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THE HOLYHEAD ROAD

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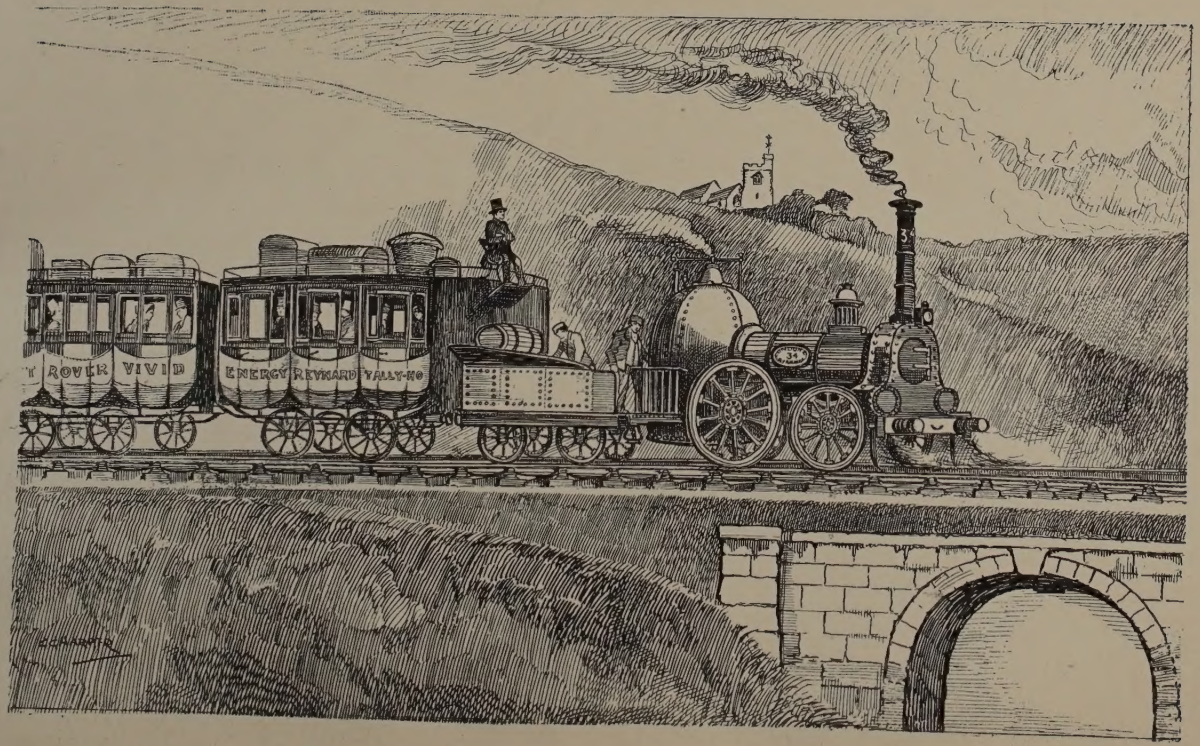

EARLY DAYS ON THE LONDON AND BIRMINGHAM RAILWAY.

THE HOLYHEAD ROAD: THE MAIL-COACH ROAD TO DUBLIN

By CHARLES G. HARPER

Author of "*The Brighton Road*," "*The Portsmouth Road*," "*The Dover Road*," "*The Bath Road*," "*The Exeter Road*," "*The Great North Road*," *and* "*The Norwich Road*"

Illustrated by the Author, and from Old-Time Prints and Pictures

Vol. II. BIRMINGHAM TO HOLYHEAD

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THE HOLYHEAD ROAD

Birmingham to Holyhead

	MILES
Birmingham (General Post Office)	109¼
Hockley	110½
Soho	111¼
Handsworth	111¾
West Bromwich	114½
Hilltop	116
Wednesbury	117¼
Moxley	118½
Bilston	119½
Wolverhampton	122¼
Chapel Ash	122¾
Tettenhall	124
The Wergs	125¼
Boningale	129½
Whiston Cross	130¼
Shiffnal	134¼
Prior's Lee	137½
Ketley	139
„ Railway Station (Junction of Watling Street with Holyhead Road.)	139½
Wellington ("Cock")	140½
Haygate	141½
Burcot Toll-House	143
Norton	146½

	MILES
Tern Bridge	147½
(Cross River Tern.)	
Atcham	148¼
(Cross River Severn.)	
Shrewsbury (Abbey Foregate)	151¼
(Cross River Severn.)	
Shrewsbury (Market House)	152
„ (Welsh Bridge and Frankwell)	152¼
(Cross River Severn.)	
Shelton Oak	154
Bicton	154½
Montford Bridge	156¾
(Cross River Severn.)	
Nesscliff	160½
West Felton	165¼
Queen's Head	166¼
Oswestry	170
Gobowen	172¾
Chirk	175
(Cross River Ceiriog.)	
Whitehurst Toll-House	177
Vron Cysylltau	179¾
Llangollen	182½
Berwyn Railway Station	184¼
Glyndyfrdwy	188
Carrog	189
Corwen	192½
(Cross River Dee.)	
Maerdy Post Office	196
Pont-y-Glyn	197¾
Tynant	198¼
Cerrig-y-Druidion	202
Glasfryn	204½
Cernioge	205¾

	MILES
Pentre Voelas	207¾
Bettws-y-Coed	214½
(Cross River Conway.)	
Swallow Falls	216
Cyfyng Falls	218½
Tan-y-Bwlch	219
Capel Curig	220
Llyn Ogwen	224
Ogwen Falls / Pass of Nant Ffrancon	225
Tyn-y-Maes	228
Bethesda	229¼
Llandegai	232¾
Bangor (Cathedral)	234½
Upper Bangor	236
Menai Bridge	237
(Cross Menai Straits.)	
Menai Village	237¼
Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerchwyrndrobwlltysilio-gogogoch	239¼
Gaerwen	242½
Pentre Berw (Holland Arms)	243
Llangristiolus	245½
Mona	247½
Gwalchmai	249¾
Bryngwran	252½
Caer Ceiliog	255
Valley	256
Stanley Sands	256¼
(Cross Stanley Sands Viaduct to Holy Island.)	
Holyhead (Admiralty Pier)	260½

THE OLD ROAD FROM MENAI VILLAGE TO HOLYHEAD

	MILES
Menai Village	237¼
Braint	239½
Ceint	242½
Llangefni	244¾
Bodffordd	247
Gwyndû and Glanyrafon	249¾
Llynfaes	250¼
Trefor	251¼
Bodedern	254
Llanyngenedl	255¼
Valley and Four-Mile Bridge	258¼
Trearddur Bay	261½
(Cross Causeway over Straits to Holy Island.)	
Holyhead	263½

The Holyhead Road

BIRMINGHAM TO HOLYHEAD

I

THERE are said to be no fewer than a hundred and forty different ways of spelling the name of Birmingham, all duly vouched for by old usage; but it is not proposed in these pages to recount them, or to follow the arguments of those who have contended for its derivation from "Bromwicham." It is singular that in the first mention we have of the place, in Domesday Book, it is spelt "Bermingham," almost exactly as it is to-day, and this lends much authority to the view that we get the place-name from an ancient Saxon tribe or family of Beormingas.

When the original Beormingas, the Sons of Beorm (whoever he may have been), settled here, in the dim Saxon past, they founded better than they knew; but they chose a hill-top, a place where no river runs, unless we choose thus to dignify the little stream called the Rea. This lack of watercourses mattered nothing at all to

mediæval Birmingham, but when, in spite of all disabilities, the place rose into commercial importance, the want began to be severely felt, and herculean have been the efforts in modern times to effect a proper water-supply.

Little but scattered mention is heard of Birmingham and its smiths before the Civil War, but when that struggle broke out, they were heard of to some purpose. Its 4000 inhabitants in 1643 were Puritans to a man, and warlike. They furnished 15,000 sword-blades for Cromwell's troops, and at a convenient opportunity waylaid the King's carriage and seized it, his furniture, and his plate. For these enormities Prince Rupert came later from Daventry and punished them severely in a battle on Camp Hill, overlooking the town. Many Birmingham men were slain that day, and eighty houses burnt; the whole affair piteously related in a tract of that time called "The Bloody Prince; or, a Declaration of the Most Cruell Practises of Prince Rupert and the rest of the Cavaliers, in fighting against God and the true Ministers of his Church." A woodcut intended to portray that sanguinary Prince appears on the cover, with Birmingham flaming furiously in the background; Daventry in the rear. The rest of the Cavaliers appear to be manœuvring somewhere else; at any rate, Rupert is alone, on horseback, with a mild expression of countenance and a big pistol.

Twenty-two years later the Plague depopu-

lated the town, but in another twenty-three years it had grown to double its former size, and by 1791 numbered between 70,000 and 80,000. Yet it had no Parliamentary representation until 1832.

That Birmingham is seated on a hill is not so evident to railway travellers, but he who comes to it by road is well advised of the fact at Bull Ring, where the hilly entrance confronts him. Bull Ring is old Birmingham of a hundred years and more ago; the nucleus of the town, and little altered since David Cox drew his picture of the market there. The market remains, but there has come about since his day an extraordinary popular appreciation of the beauty of flowers, so that, instead of the fowls pictured largely in his view, the crowded stalls are radiant with blooms of every sort; cut flowers, and growing plants.

Here stands, as ever, St. Martin's, the mother-church of Birmingham, where the ancient manorial lords of the place lie; those de Berminghams whose last representative was choused out of his rights in 1545. Here is that statue of Nelson for whose proper cleansing a patriotic tradesman left by will sixpence a week; and here occurred the Wesley riots of 1742 and the Chartist Riot of 1839. When Charles Wesley sought to preach, the people set the church bells a-ringing to drown his voice, and then began to pelt him with dirt and turnips; but the political riot was a much more serious affair, resulting in the pillaging of shops and houses, and immense damage.

II

In Birmingham, close upon four hundred years ago, Leland found but one street, yet that street was full of smiths, making knives and "all manner of cuttinge tooles, and many loriners that make bittes, and a great many naylors. Soe that a great part of the towne is maintained by smithes, who have their iron and sea-cole out of Staffordshire."

Not only has Birmingham grown out of all knowledge since that time, but it has largely changed its trades. Sheffield has taken away the pick of the cutlery trade, and that of the loriners has its chief seat at Walsall; but Birmingham now makes everything, from a monster engine to a pin's head, and in the murderous art of manufacturing fire-arms is pre-eminent.

"She is," observed an enthusiastic writer, "in the truest sense the benefactress of the universal man, from the crowned head to the savage of the wilderness." To the crowned heads, for example—or to their governments—Birmingham supplies stands of arms and ammunition; and to the savage, guns warranted to hurt no one but he who uses them. Civilisation is thus heavily indebted to Birmingham, and religion too; for if the heathen, who "in his blindness bows down to wood and stone," is no longer restricted to those two materials, by reason of Birmingham industriously supplying little tin and brass gods

BULL RING.

From a Print after David Cox.

by wholesale, and at extremely low prices, to Africa or India, yet on Sundays the godly folks of her hundred churches and chapels liberally subscribe to missionary funds for spreading Christianity in strange lands, and thus help to discredit the heathen Vishnus, Sivas, Hanumans, and assorted Mumbo-Jumbos they export.

"Birmingham," said Burke, a hundred years ago, "is the toyshop of Europe." Fancy articles in steel and paste; buckles, sword-hilts, buttons, and a thousand other trifles were made, for home or export; among them the sham, or "Brummagem" jewellery, and the base coin that long cast a slur upon the town. Things coming from Birmingham were in those times rightly suspect. One of its industries was the making of "silver" buckles of a villainous kind of cheap white metal, called from its nature "soft tommy." A tale is told of the owner of the factory where this precious stuff was made up, going through one of the workshops and hearing a workman cursing the man who would chance to wear the pair of buckles he was making.

"Why," asked the astonished employer, "do you do that?"

"Well," replied the workman, "whoever wears these buckles is bound to curse the man that made them, and so I thought I would be the first."

Those were the days when it was said that if you gave a guinea and a copper kettle to a

Birmingham manufacturing jeweller he would turn you out a hundred guineas' worth of jewellery!

Things are very different now. The trades of Birmingham seem almost countless in their number; many of them conducted on a scale large enough for each one to suffice a small township of workers. Brass-founding, tube-making, gunsmithing, pin-making, wire-drawing, screw-turning, goldsmithing, electro-plating, tin-plate working, coining (in the legitimate kind), steel pen-making—these are but a few of the countless industries to whose skirts clings for livelihood a population of half a million.

When Mr. Pickwick visited Birmingham, he repaired to the "Old Royal" hotel. Where is the "Old Royal" now? Ask of the winds—nay, consult the histories of Birmingham, and you shall learn. But if the old hotel and many of its fellows be gone, at least the description of the entrance to the town holds good, and "the dingy hue of every object visible, the murky atmosphere, the paths of cinders and brick-dust" are phrases that awake echoes of recollection in the breasts of those who know the town of old: but "the dense smoke issuing heavily forth from high toppling chimneys, blackening and obscuring everything around," is not so descriptive of the Birmingham of to-day. For fully realising that picture, and the added touches of the "deep red glow of furnace fires, the glare of distant lights, the ponderous

waggons laden with clashing rods of iron, or piled with heavy goods," one must journey to Dudley, where such things may be seen and heard in a hellish crescendo: Birmingham has largely put those things in the background. In Mr. Pickwick's time "the hum of labour resounded from every house, lights gleamed from the long casement windows in the attic storeys, and the whirr of wheels and noise of machinery shook the trembling walls, and the din of hammers, the rushing of steam, and the dead, heavy clanking of engines was the harsh music that arose from every quarter"; but most of these things are nowadays decently hid in purlieus remote, or masked from the chief streets by the towering modern buildings of hotels, banks, assurance offices, and all the hundred-and-one parasitical things of a limited liability age, that fasten like vermin on the producing body.

Birmingham became a City on January 14th, 1889. It is a City of two fine streets, surrounded by many miles of formless, featureless, dull and commonplace (or, at their worst, hideous and squalid) houses, workshops, and factories of every size and description. New Street was only new at a period over a century ago. Corporation Street was formed in 1874 by boldly cutting through a mass of slums. In those two thoroughfares, and the open space by the Town Hall to which they both lead, is included almost everything of architectural note.

In their course are to be found the best and most attractive shops, and the principal banks and commercial offices. The rest is merely of a local and provincial character.

The geographical, municipal, and political centre is, of course, that spot where the Town Hall stands, a grim and massive building in the Corinthian style, with that air of age and permanency about its rusticated basement, as though when the Anglo-Saxons came they had found it here, the relic of an ancient civilisation. But the Town Hall can lay no claim to antiquity, built as it was in 1832. Around it, in an open space of a singularly irregular shape, are the General Post Office, the Art Gallery, the great Free Library, and other municipal buildings proper to a city so rich and prosperous; and, scattered about the pavements, a miscellaneous collection of statues, facing towards New Street Station, as though they formed some kind of deputation assembled there to welcome visitors. It is a very oddly assorted crowd, captained by Queen Victoria, and formed of such varied items as Joseph Priestley (who with his burning glass looks as though he were critically examining a bad coin), Peel, John Skirrow, Wright, George Dawson, James Watt, and Sir Josiah Mason. In the little corner called Chamberlain Square the curious will find a monument to the energy and enterprise (the "pushfulness" as those who love him not might call it) of Joseph

Chamberlain, without whose work and initiative Birmingham would not own, as it does to-day, its gas, water, and tramways, and could not show such evidences of progress in new and handsome streets and model government.

It is a far cry from the Red Radical days of Birmingham's great Mayor in 1874 to those of the Colonial Secretary, a pillar of the Empire and the darling of Duchesses. Perhaps no other man has, politically, travelled so far, estranged so many friends, or made such strangely alien alliances, with the result that his sheaf has been exalted over his brethren these years past. Hence the extreme bitterness of the hatred his name arouses in certain circles.

The memorial to his work on the comparatively small stage of Birmingham, before he trod the boards of Westminster, takes the form of a Gothic canopied fountain, with a profile portrait medallion, whereon one may trace in the aggressive, sharp-pointed nose a striking likeness to William Pitt, and that suggestion of the crafty fox the venomous caricaturists of a later day have seized and used to such advantage.

III

Sir William Dugdale, in his diary, under date of July 16th, 1679, mentions the first Birmingham

coach we have any notice of. He says, "I came out of London by the stage-coach of Bermicham to Banbury." That is all we learn of specifically Birmingham coaches until 1731, when Rothwell's began to ply to London in two days and a half, according to the old coaching bill still preserved.

Afterwards came the Flying Coach of 1742, followed in 1758 by an "improved Birmingham Coach," with the legend "Friction Annihilated" prominent on the axle-boxes. This the *Annual Register* declared to be "perhaps the most useful invention in mechanics this age has produced." Much virtue lingered in that "perhaps," for nothing more was heard of that wonderful device.

In 1812 the Post Office established a Birmingham Mail, and great was the local rejoicing on May 26th, when, attended by eight mail-guards in full uniform, adorned with blue ribbons, it paraded the streets. After two hours' procession, when coachman and guards were feasted with wine, biscuits, and sandwiches, the Mail set out for London from the "Swan" Hotel, amid the ringing of St. Martin's bells and the cheering of the assembled thousands.

Eight years later it was estimated that Birmingham owned eighty-four coaches. Forty of these were daily, and most plied on bye-roads.

From 1822 to 1826 Birmingham witnessed a great improvement in its coaches. Waddell owned the two most prominent yards in the town, but had many ardent competitors. In 1822 the "Tally-ho" was established, shortly to

BIRMINGHAM STAGE-COACH,

In Two *Days* and a half; begins *May* the 24th, 1731.

SET Sout from the *Swan-Inn* in *Birmingham*, every *Monday* at ſix a Clock in the Morning, through *Warwick*, *Banbury* and *Alesbury*, to the *Red Lion Inn* in *Alderſgate ſtreet*, *London*, every *Wedneſday* Morning: And returns from the ſaid *Red Lion Inn* every *Thurſday* Morning at five a Clock the ſame Way to the *Swan-Inn* in *Birmingham* every *Saturday*, at 21 Shillings each Paſſenger, and 18 Shillings from *Warwick*, who has liberty to carry 14 Pounds in Weight, and all above to *pay One Penny a Pound*.

Perform'd (if God permit)

By Nicholas Rothwell.

The Weekly Waggon ſets out every *Tueſday from the Nagg's-Head in Birmingham*, to the Red Lion Inn *aforeſaid*, every *Saturday*, and returns *from the ſaid Inn* every *Monday*, to the *Nagg's-Head in Birmingham* every *Thurſday*.

Note, *By the ſaid* Nicholas Rothwell *at* Warwick, *all Perſons may be furniſhed with a* 'By-Coach' Chariot, Chaiſe, or Hearſe, with a Mourning Coach and able Horſes, to any Part of Great Britain, at reaſonable Rates. And alſo Saddle Horſes to be had.

OLD BIRMINGHAM COACHING BILL.

be followed by the hotly competing "Independent," "Real," and "Patent" Tally-hoes. Supposed to keep a pace of ten miles an hour, they no sooner left the town behind than they started racing, to the terror of the nervous and the delight of the sporting passengers. Annually, on the First of May, they were spurred to superhuman and super-equine exertions, and, we are told, covered the hundred and eight miles between Birmingham and London "under seven hours." How much under is not stated, but as an even seven hours gives us fifteen miles an hour, including stops, the pace must have been furious. Harry Tresslove, the coachman of the "Independent Tally Ho," always galloped the five-mile stage between Dunchurch and the "Black Dog," Stretton-upon-Dunsmore, in eighteen minutes.

The existence of all stage-coaches being furiously competitive, they could not afford to be quiet and plain, like the Mails. "Once I remember," says De Quincey, "being on the top of the Holyhead Mail between Shrewsbury and Oswestry, when a tawdry thing from Birmingham, some 'Tally-ho' or 'High-flyer,' all flaunting with green and gold, came up alongside of us. What a contrast with our royal simplicity of form and colour in this plebeian wretch! The single ornament on our dark ground of chocolate colour was the mighty shield of the Imperial arms, but emblazoned in proportion as modest as a signet-ring bears to a seal of office. Even this was displayed only on a single panel,

whispering, rather than proclaiming, our relations to the mighty State; whilst the beast from Birmingham, our green-and-gold friend from false, fleeting, perjured Brummagem, had as much writing and painting on its sprawling flanks as would have puzzled a decipherer from the tombs of Luxor. For some time this Birmingham machine ran along by our side—a piece of familiarity that already of itself seemed to me sufficiently Jacobinical. But all at once a movement of the horses announced a desperate intention of leaving us behind. 'Do you see *that?*' I said to the coachman. 'I see,' was his short answer. He was wide awake, yet he waited longer than seemed prudent, for the horses of our audacious opponent had a disagreeable air of freshness and power. But his motive was loyal; his wish was that the Birmingham conceit should be full-blown before he froze it. When that seemed right he unloosed, or, to speak by a stronger word, he *sprang* his unknown resources: he slipped our Royal horses like cheetahs, or hunting-leopards, after the affrighted game. How they could retain such a reserve of fiery power after the work they had accomplished seemed hard to explain. But on our side, besides the physical superiority, was a tower of moral strength, namely, the King's Name. Passing them without an effort, as it seemed, we threw them into the rear with so lengthening an interval between us as proved in itself the bitterest mockery of their presumption; whilst

our guard blew back a shattering blast of triumph that was really too painfully full of derision."

The "Emerald" was a fast night coach between London and Birmingham, "driven," says Colonel Corbet, in his book, *An Old Coachman's Chatter*, "by Harry Lee, whose complexion was of a very peculiar colour, almost resembling that of a bullock's liver—the fruit of strong potations of 'early purl' or 'dog's nose,' taken after the exertions of the night and before going to bed."

The last coach put on the road between London and Birmingham, we are told, on the same authority, was in 1837. It was a very fast day mail, started to run to Birmingham and then on to Crewe, where it transferred mails and passengers to the railway for Liverpool. It was horsed by Sherman, and timed at twelve miles an hour.

Early or late in the coaching era robbery flourished. In the opening years the coaches, as already abundantly noted, were held up by the conventional figure of the highwayman; but, as civilisation advanced, methods changed, and, instead of bestriding a high-mettled steed at the cross-roads, there to await the coach, the thief, in concert with a chosen band, booked seats, and during a long journey cut open the boot from the inside of the vehicle, and having safely extracted the bank parcels and other valuables, made off from the next stopping-place with ease and complete safety. The advantages of this

method were so obvious that coaching history teems with examples of such robberies. Very often, however, the booty was in notes, and difficult to turn to any account. Hauls such as that described in *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* of February 17th, 1823, were rare. It mentioned: "A parcel containing 600 sovereigns, directed to Messrs. Attwood and Spooner, was stolen last week from one of the London coaches, on its way to Birmingham." The bankers never saw the colour of their money again.

IV

Birmingham, says De Quincey, was, under the old dynasty of stage-coaches and postchaises, the centre of our travelling system. He did not like Birmingham. How many they are who do not! But, look you, he gives his reasons, and acknowledges that circumstances, and not Birmingham wholly, were the cause of *his* dislike. "Noisy, gloomy and dirty" he calls the town. "Gloomy," because, having passed through it a hundred times, those occasions were always and invariably (less once), days and nights of rain. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred; what a monstrous proportion! And even so, the hundredth was just one fleeting

glimpse of sunshine, as the Mail whirled him through; so that he—with a parting sarcasm—had not time to see whether that sunshine was, in fact, real, or whether it might not possibly be some gilt Brummagen counterfeit; "For you know," says he, "men of Birmingham, that you *can* counterfeit—such is your cleverness—all things in Heaven and earth, from Jove's thunderbolts down to a tailor's bodkin."

THE "HEN AND CHICKENS," 1830.

De Quincey put up, as most travellers of his time were used to do, at the famous "Hen and Chickens"; the enormous "Hen and Chickens." "Never did I sleep there, but I had reason to complain that the discreet hen did not gather her vagrant flock to roost at less variable hours. Till two or three, I was kept waking by those who were retiring; and about three commenced the morning functions of the porter, or of 'boots,' or of 'under-boots,'

who began their rounds for collecting the several freights for the Highflyer, or the Tally-ho, or the Bang-up, to all points of the compass, and too often (as must happen in such immense establishments) blundered into my room with that appalling, 'Now, sir, the horses are coming out.' So that rarely, indeed, have I happened to *sleep* in Birmingham."

The old Hen in High Street, ceased very many years ago to lay golden eggs, and her Chickens were dispersed, to be gathered under a new roof in 1798. The first notice of the original "Hen and Chickens" appeared in an advertisement of December 14th, 1741. In 1770, a certain "Widow Thomas" kept it, and in 1784 one Richard Lloyd. When he died, his widow carried on the business until the expiration of the lease in 1798. This lady, Mrs. Sarah Lloyd, was one of those enterprising and business-like women who — like Mrs. Ann Nelson and Mrs. Mountain—left so great a mark upon that age. She was not content to renew her lease of the old house, for which she had hitherto paid £100 a year rent; but, with a keen appreciation of Birmingham improvements, purchased a plot of land in the newly formed New Street, and, some time before the lease of the old house expired, began to build a much larger and imposing structure, "from the designs of James Wyatt, Esq." It was one of the first houses in Birmingham to be built of stone, instead of brick. To this

she removed in 1798, and named it "Lloyd's Hotel and Hen and Chickens Inn."

Mrs. Sarah Lloyd, who to many of her more irreverent guests typified the old Hen, sold her business and leased the inn five years later, April 16th, 1804, to William Waddell, of the "Castle," High Street. He was the son of a London oil merchant, and years before had married Miss Ibberson, daughter of the proprietor of the "George and Blue Boar," Holborn.

It was during Waddell's reign that the "Hen and Chickens" saw its greatest prosperity. His rule extended from 1804 until 1836, ending only with his death in that year; and not only covered the best years of the coaching era, but almost saw its close. His was the greatest figure in Birmingham's coaching business. In 1830 he had purchased the freehold of the "Hen and Chickens" and about the same time bought the "Swan," and with his son Thomas carried on a general coaching business and contracting for the Mails.

In 1819 thirty coaches left the "Hen and Chickens" yard daily; by 1838 the ultimate year, the number was thirty-two. But by far the greatest number started from the "Swan," for in 1838 no fewer than sixty-one coaches hailed from thence.

On Waddell's decease the freeholds of both the houses were sold, and bought in by members of the family; that of the "Hen and

Chickens" realising £14,500, and the "Swan," £6,520. The beds alone of the "Hen and Chickens" were then stated to bring in £800 per annum. The "Hen and Chickens" was then leased by Devis, of the "Coach and Horses," Worcester Street, at a rent of £600. He shortly afterwards sublet it for £700 to Mrs. Room, a widowed innkeeper, who remarried and gave it up in 1843, after a term of seven years, when Devis resumed.

These appear to have been ill years for the famous old house. Coaching and posting business had decayed, and the commercial growth of Birmingham did not make amends for the loss of the good business done with the nobility and gentry who resorted here in the old days of the road, but now travelled through by train. Devis, accordingly disappears, and the Waddell family, finding difficulties in getting a tenant, put in a manager, Joseph Shore by name. A tenant was at length found in Frank Smith, who had long been a druggist in New Street, but was now ready to try his fortune as hotel-keeper. His rule extended from 1849 to 1867, and was then changed for that of Oldfield, who reigned until 1878, when the old fittings of the hotel were sold and its career brought to a close. The end of the building, was, however, not yet, and the "Hen and Chickens" continued in a modified form, until 1895. Lately it has been pulled down, and a tall, showy "Hen and Chickens Hotel and Restau-

rant," in a Victorian Renaissance style and liver-coloured terra-cotta erected on the site; a complete change from the old house, once looked upon as an ornament to New Street, but become at last, owing to the rebuilding carried on all around, altogether out of date and, by contrast, heavy and gloomy. Its severe architecture had been frilled and furbelowed at different times — a portico built out over the pavement in 1830, and a stone attic storey added in more recent years, with a saucy turret at one end—but, however comfortable within, the exterior suggested a bank or some sort of public institution, rather than the warmth and good cheer of an hostelry, and so it was swept away.

"The Fowls" as Young Birmingham delighted to call the "Hen and Chickens," housed of course many notable persons, but not those of the most exclusive kind. The "Royal," where no coaches came, was in those days the first house. In later days, however, somewhere about 1874, the "Hen and Chickens" lodged the Grand Duke of Hesse, and never ceased to boast the fact. Absurdly much was made of him. He walked on special carpets, dined off plate that had graced no plebeian board, and came and went between rows of servants frozen at a reverential angle of forty-five degrees. The management even went to the length of placing likenesses of his wife on his dressing-table, to make it seem more home-like. Excellent

creatures! How touching a belief they cherished in the prevalence of the domestic virtues, even in the august circumstances of a Grand Duke!

V

Although the "Hen and Chickens" had so early been removed to New Street, Bull Ring and High Street continued to be the chief coaching thoroughfares. There stood the "Swan," the "Dog" afterwards known as the "Nelson," the "Castle," "Albion," and "St. George's Tavern." In Bull Street was the "Saracen's Head."

But the most exclusive and aristocratic of all was the "Royal," afterwards known as the "Old Royal." This was the house mentioned in the "Pickwick Papers," where the waiter, having at last got an order for something, "imperceptibly melted away." It stood in Temple Row, and long arrogated to itself, before ever the title of "Royal" came into use, the name of "The Hotel." Other hotels there were, but this proud house professed ignorance of them. It was originally built, with its Assembly Rooms, in 1772, and set forth, as a special attraction to its patrons, the statement that no coaches ever approached to disturb the holy quiet of Temple Row.

It was about 1825 that something of this seclusion was sloughed off, and the business transferred to the old Portugal House in New Street, where, with two additional wings, it blossomed forth as the "New Royal." Its old supremacy now began to be challenged by the newly established "Stork," in Old Square, then a quiet and dignified retreat, very different from the same place to-day, with its flashing

THE "OLD ROYAL."

shops, electric lights, and tramways; nothing now old about it, excepting its name. The "Stork," of course, suffered something at the hands and pens of witlings, just as did the "Pelican" at Speenhamland, on the Bath Road! and to make humorous reference to its "long bill" was the custom, whether the charges were high or moderate.

But the days of the old hotels, exclusive or otherwise, were in sight when the railway came.

Another sort replaced them, and, although the kind in its turn has gone out of favour, examples may yet be found. Who does not know the typical hotel of, say, the Fifties and the Sixties, that abominably draughty type of building, all cold would-be magnificence and interminable flights of stairs, with lofty rooms, apparently built for a Titanic race fifteen feet in height, and, by consequence, never warm, and never with an air of being fully furnished. That such as these should ever have replaced the cosy old houses can only be explained on the score of fashion, for there are illogical and senseless fashions in architecture, as in everything else.

The railway era commenced in Birmingham with the opening of the Grand Junction and the London and Birmingham Railways in 1837 and 1838. The early railway engines and carriages, and, indeed, everything connected with those days of the rail, are curious nowadays, and not the least amusing are the comments then made on travelling by steam. "A railway conveyance," said one, writing in favour of the coaches, "is a locomotive prison, and, the novelty of it having subsided, we shall seldom hear of a gentleman condescending to assume this hasty mode of transit." That was a very bad shot at prophecy, but it was followed by a perfect howler in the way of error. "It has already been proved," says this person, "that railways are not calculated to carry heavy goods."

An early London and Birmingham train was

an odd spectacle; the engine with immensely tall funnel, and a huge domed fire-box; the carriages modelled on the lines of stage-coaches, and their panels painted with high-sounding names. Luggage was carried on the roof, and the first guards rode outside with it, until the cinders and red-hot coals from the engine half blinded them and destroyed their uniform, when they quitted that absurd position and travelled inside. Early railway journeys were penitential for travellers, for, instead of rolling smoothly over wooden sleepers, the granite slabs to which the fish-bellied rails of that time were riveted, produced a continual jarring and a deafening rattle. Fares too, with less than a quarter of the accommodation now provided, were almost double what they are now, and the breaking-down of engines, and all manner of awkward accidents, disposed many to think a revival of coaches probable.

VI

The way out of Birmingham is dismal and unpromising, by way of Livery Street and Great Hampton Street. At the end of that thoroughfare—formerly known as Hangman's Lane—Birmingham is left behind; but some seventeen miles of continuous streets, ill-paved and hilly,

and infested with tramways, yet lie before the pilgrim.

Livery Street, so-called (at a hazard) because its granite setts jolt so unmercifully the cyclist who is rash enough to ride along it, gives an outlook on to close-packed, mean, and frowsy little courts and thoroughfares with grotesquely common-place or absurd names—among them "Mary Ann Street." Here and along Great Hampton Street, where the smuts from Snow Hill Station and those from adjacent factories now fall thickest, the Birmingham of little more than a century ago ended, and gave place to the open heath of Soho, enclosed only in 1793. "At the second milestone," says an old Birmingham guide-book, "on the left, when you have passed through the turnpike, is Soho Factory, a magnificent pile of buildings"; but that great workshop of Boulton and Watt has long since disappeared and the turnpike itself forgot; while Soho Heath is covered, far and near, with streets of a terribly monotonous kind —as like one another as the peas in a pea-pod. The only landmarks and bright spots are public-houses. Not inns for travellers, but gin-palaces for boozers, where plate-glass, gas-lamps the size of balloons, and florid architecture give the inhabitants of these wilds their only idea of style and distinction, and that a mistaken one. All else is dull and grey. Such are Hockley and Soho, and such is Handsworth.

Between those two last Warwickshire is left

behind, and Staffordshire entered—"Staffordshire ful of Queenys," as an old writer has it. What he meant by that, no commentator appears yet to have explained, but it sounds complimentary.

The "elegant village" of Handsworth, as it is called by the author of that old guide-book already quoted, was built over the great surrounding commons, enclosed in 1793. That extraordinary person seems to look upon this enclosing and filching of public property as virtuous and altogether praiseworthy, and talks with unctuous satisfaction of "at least 150 respectable houses erected on land which lay formerly entirely waste. Plots of land"—he continues, with greasy delight—"have been sold from £200 to £1,000 an acre."

He tells the same tale of the waste lands of West Bromwich, enclosed in 1804, and realising similar sums. These long thoroughfares, therefore, are nearly all built upon stolen property, and the rents of the houses should by right go into municipal or imperial coffers, instead of private pockets.

West Bromwich, the greater part of whose site was a rabbit-warren so late as 1806, is a continuation of this weary street. Here, perhaps, it was that Mr. Bull, "an eminent tea merchant," while journeying on horseback from Wolverhampton to London in October, 1742, was overtaken by "a single Man on Horseback, whom he took for a Gentleman. After they had rode three or four miles," the account continues, "the high-

wayman then ordered him to deliver, which Mr. Bull took to be in Jest; but he told him that he was in Earnest, and accordingly robb'd him of about four Guineas and his Watch, and afterwards rode with him three miles, till they came near a Town, when the Highwayman rode off."

West Bromwich is now a busy ironworking town, with newly opened collieries and a population of 90,000. Just as the cuttle-fish obscures its surroundings by exuding an inky fluid, so do West Bromwich and Dudley, away to the left, belch forth clouds of smoke, and between them fill the sky with a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night. The road, running as it does at a considerable height, commands a good view of the clustered towns and districts of the Black Country, with the sullen-looking canals, collieries, blast-furnaces, and a hundred other kinds of the commercial enterprises of this wonderful hive of industry. Dudley, with its ancient castle on a hill-top, wreathed in inky fumes, and Dudley Port down below, with rows of brick and tile works spouting smoke so black and dense as to look almost solid, form the centre; with Tipton, Oldbury, Priestfield, and Swan Village as satellites offering their contributions to the general stock of grime and obscurity. At night all this is changed, and the chimneys that in daylight seemed only to smoke all become tipped with tongues of fire, casting a lurid glow upon earth and sky. Turner has

left, in his weird picture of Dudley, a characteristic view of Black Country scenery; and Dickens, in the morbid pages of the *Old Curiosity Shop*, has described its darker and more repellent side. It is a country where every effort of Nature to put forth leaves and grass is thwarted. Land not built upon has been ransacked for mineral wealth and turned inside out, with the result that on the shale and débris only the scantiest and most innutritious of weeds can find a livelihood—and weeds commonly thrive where nothing else can exist.

VII

At Hilltop, where the rattling and belching steam tramcars branch off for Dudley, a descent is made by Holloway Bank to Wednesbury—the "Wodensburgh," as it is thought to have been, of Saxon times, and the "Wedgebury" of modern local parlance. Wednesbury begins at the bottom of this descent at Wednesbury Bridge, where the filthy stream called the river Tame trickles between slimy mud-banks under the brick arches built by Telford in 1826; but the end of one town and the beginning of another in the Black Country, where the streets between half a dozen townships are continuous, can only be noted with certainty by the borough sur-

DUDLEY

After J. W. M. Turner, R.A.

veyors concerned. There are still on the West Bromwich side of the bridge a few queerly gabled old cottages—kept white by dint of constant recourse to the whitewash pail and brush—that show by their sunken position how the road once dipped to the ford, before the bridge was built.

Wednesbury is not, any more than its neighbours, a place of beauty; but it is of far more remote origin than most, and, though it be dirty and foul, and surrounded by waste lands like a vast congeries of domestic dustbins, has a story going back to Saxon times, and the highly romantic connection with Woden, the war-god, already hinted at. The old parish church, conspicuous on the hill that forms the site of Wednesbury, is beautiful within, even though as black as your hat outside, and, moreover, dates as to its foundations from the Norman period. Those foundations have an unusual interest, built as they are of the material called "pockstone," which is nothing less than surface-clay baked and burnt by the underground fires that have raged at intervals from time immemorial in the coal-beds underlying the town and its surroundings.

For Wednesbury is, or was, one great coal-field, and long before its modern iron and steel trades had developed, was a place of collieries. Many of them are exhausted now, but there were times when to dig in one's back-yard was to open up a private coal-mine and find fuel

for the seeking, so near the surface did the coal-measures lie. Even to this day, when the streets are "up" for new gas or water pipes, the excavating discloses coal of sorts: not perhaps equal to the best Wallsend, but still coal that will burn and give out heat, and as such eagerly pounced upon by the poor little ragamuffins of the town, who come forth with bags and baskets and aprons to freely fill the domestic scuttle.

The first coal-getting at Wednesbury was by "openworks," just as gravel is dug, or the brick-earth of brickfields is excavated. These "openworks" are very ancient and mostly disused, and even in places where they still yield coal, it is of inferior quality. To these succeeded the "bell-pits" of the middle period, and the deep levels of more modern times. In all this succession of years the underground conflagrations continued, and the parish registers contain many references to them; for example, when on "June y^e^ 20th, 1731," a collier was "most dismally scorched and roasted to death by ye Hellish Wildfire." Even in recent years these fires, thought to be caused by spontaneous combustion, have broken out. Such was the one that burned from 1894 until 1898, and not only destroyed a great part of the King's Hill Road, but caused the death of a watchman, who fell into one of the gaping holes and was burnt to death.

Wednesbury's blast-furnaces, foundries, iron

and brass and steel tube works, and manufacture of railway wheels and axles support the place, now that coal is not so plentifully got. The quantities of railway material may not surprise one, but feelings of astonishment arise on contemplation of the tubing produced—tubing for bicycles, bedsteads, water-pipes, gas-mains, and for many other purposes known only to specialists in these matters; tubing from gauges as slender as a lead-pencil to a size ample enough for one to crawl into, if so minded. All the world, it might be thought from a sight of these things, has an insatiable appetite for tubes!

The coal trade is not so completely exhausted but that pit-men are a common enough sight in Wednesbury, and pit-girls too, or rather pit-bank lasses; gentle creatures who sort and pick the coal over at the pit's mouth, and have muscles strong enough to fell an ox. It is not known when a lass of the pit-bank ceases to be a lass; probably they always remain so, just as postboys were, and "Cape boys" are, nominally juveniles for the term of their natural lives. Let it not, however, be thought that the pit-lass is being made fun of: it is done here in print as little as it is likely to be within reach of her brawny arm.

A curious revival of old customs here is the trade of the "coal-jagger," a peripatetic retailer of coals to the poorer classes. The moneyed man may have his coals in by the ton, but the

working-man buys his by the pony or donkey load of the jagger, who may be seen in the streets leading a patient and depressed animal hitched up to three or more odd little three-wheeled trucks, coupled together like a miniature mineral-train. Each truck contains about a sackful of coals, offered direct from the pit's mouth at a price low enough to suit modest weekly exchequers.

VIII

Down-hill from Wednesbury Market Place, and thence rising to Cock Heath and Moxley, the road runs between rubbish-heaps; a scene of desolation that, however ill it may be to live near to, makes a not unpleasing picture in a sketch, taken at a backward glance, with the town grouped on a curving sky-line. Moxley, perhaps, hints at decayed trade in the sign of the mean little "Struggler" inn.

As for Bilston, where is the man heroic enough to sound its praises? Passengers by railway, passing through Bilston, see only deserted slag-heaps, cinder mounds, and a general area of desolation, but the road reveals Bilston in an added squalor of grimy houses and frowzy courts. The collieries and ironworks that created the town are things of the past,

and their ruins only remain to tell of what it was a century ago. Surely never was there a more second-hand looking place than Bilston is now, with its long street apparently divided between old-clothes shops, "marine stores," pawnbrokers' establishments, and public-houses. Even Bilston gritstone, once prized for the making of grindstones, is under a cloud, and the old saying, that "a Dudley man and a

WEDNESBURY.

Bilston grindstone may be found all the world over," takes a new significance in the fact that the enterprising native, if he wishes scope for his enterprise, must go forth in the world to places as yet unexhausted. But the decay of the town perhaps dates more certainly from the fearful times of the cholera epidemic of 1832, when Bilston suffered more severely than any other place; when so many died that help

had to be brought from other districts to bury them; and when hundreds of children were left fatherless and motherless in the stricken town. Of a population numbering 14,492, no fewer than 742 died.

You enter Bilston across a tract of abandoned coal mines, and leave it for a similar waste. The forlorn and derelict condition of these deserted mining fields, strewn with shale and piled with fantastic, but always grim and forbidding, rubbish heaps, is a blot upon these busy districts, and a reproach to the condition of affairs that permits such things. Apart from the certainty that the mineral wealth of a country should be the property of the State rather than of the individual landowner, the question of the deserted coal-fields is a very serious one. Here, in these barren and absolutely unproductive wastes, the cynical selfishness of the landed class is abundantly evident. The coal measures exhausted and the collieries closed down, the land is unoccupied and contributes nothing in rates or taxes. It may lie thus, unfenced and hideously sterile, until such time as it is wanted for building operations. In many instances it will never be required for that purpose, and so much land has thus permanently become as useless as the Sahara or the stony deserts of Arabia. There is no reason, beyond individual self-interest, why such a state of things should exist. Before the pits were sunk and coal dug, these wild

and uncared-for tracts were in many cases cultivated fields, from which the soil was removed when the colliery companies began operations. In leasing ground for this purpose, landowners usually insert a clause protecting themselves in the event of the coal being exhausted and the works deserted; a clause binding lessees to restore the surface soil, or to pay a fine of £30 an acre. In practice, it is much cheaper to pay the £30 fine on every acre than it would be to remove the refuse-heaps and to spread the nutritious soil over the land again; hence these abominations of desolation that else might become fields once more, grow the kindly fruits of the earth again, employ industry, and contribute toward the rates and taxes of the community.

The old red-brick toll-house still standing by the wayside, about two miles from Wolverhampton, where Gibbet Lane toll-gate once barred the way, is in midst of these wastes. The modern settlement of Monmore Green, as little like the picture of a village green, conjured up by its name, as possible, is beyond. It was here in September, 1829, that the "Greyhound" coach came to grief on its way to Birmingham. The breaking of an axle, that fruitful source of disaster, threw the coach over, and of the five "outsides" who jumped for their lives, one was killed, and the other four badly injured.

The great and progressive town of Wolverhampton now looms ahead, a busy and thriving

contrast with the scenes just passed, and a place second to none in the forward strides made towards improvement in these days of its expansion.

IX

The old entrance into Wolverhampton, before the making of Cleveland Road in 1830, was by the narrow Bilston Street, still remaining as an object-lesson in old-time thoroughfares, and thence by Snow Hill along Dudley Street, and so into what was then called "High Green," now known as "Queen Square." Darlington Street did not come into being until 1821, and before that time the rest of the way through the town and out at the other end, followed a devious course, by lanes long since swept away, or widened out of recognition. Coaches changing horses at the "Peacock" in Snow Hill, a house still existing as the "Swan and Peacock," had the privilege of driving through its yard, and so by a short cut into Bell Street, across into Barn Street (long since re-christened Salop Street), and right away for Chapel Ash, and the open country again. The coaches thus privileged were the "Tally-ho," "Hibernia," "Crown Prince," "Emerald," "Reindeer," and "Beehive." The mails and other coaches using the "Swan"

in High Green, or Market Place as it was indifferently called, or the "Lion" in North Street close by, had a longer journey, and threaded a mazy course utterly vanished and forgotten since the broad and spacious thoroughfare of Darlington Street was made.

Wolverhampton has nothing to do with wolves. It was never the "wolves' town" of Dr. Mandell Creighton's contemptibly childish etymology, but probably derived its name from Wulfrūn, sister of Ethelred II. She it was who in 994 founded the great collegiate church of St. Peter, that, collegiate no longer, stands on the crest of the waterless ridge forming the site of the town. It is true that there had been both a church and a town here before that time, for Wulfhere, first Christian king of Mercia, dedicated a church to St. Mary at "Hamtun" in the year 657, and the names of both founders have such close points of similarity that there must ever remain some uncertainty as to which of them really gave Hampton its distinguishing prefix. It may be noted as a curious fact that the town is still known in the surrounding districts as "Hampton."

Although it is not approached from Birmingham and Bilston by any appreciable hill, Wolverhampton is seen by one standing in Queen Square —now, as ever, the centre of the town—to occupy an elevated site, sloping rapidly towards the west. It is, indeed, situated, very curiously, three hundred feet above sea-level, and on the

great watershed dividing the river-system of the Midlands. To the east flows the Trent into the German Ocean, and to the west the Severn and its tributaries empty themselves into the Bristol Channel; but, decreeing though it does the destinies of those rivers, this ridge itself sends forth only the rivulet called the Smestow.

Wolverhampton is (not very happily) called the "Capital of the Black Country." That title is misleading, for the reason that, although it has grown enormously, and has long ceased to be the agricultural market-town it once was, it stands, not in the centre, but at the very edge of that busy and grimy tract. Coming through the Black Country from Birmingham you suddenly, on taking leave of Wolverhampton, step over the threshold again into a land of grass and trees and clear sunshine.

It is a fine and an interesting town, not wholly given up to factories and soot, and still keeping a hold upon ancient memories in the great church of St. Peter, a noble building that, about 1450, rose upon the site of Wulfrūn's church, and presents as magnificent an example of the Perpendicular style as anything to be found in the Midlands. Much might be said of St. Peter's if this were the place for it—of its rich interior, of the curious and beautiful carved stone pulpit, and its grotesque lion, goggling with its stony eyes, erected about 1480, and of the life-sized bronze statue of Admiral Sir Richard Leveson, by Le Sœur, that supreme

artist who wrought the beautiful equestrian statue of Charles I. at Charing Cross. But these pages are not for lengthy archæological disquisitions, and so St. Peter's must needs be thus summarised, and even that fruitful source of angry discussion, the so-called "Dane's Cross" in the churchyard, must be but mentioned. It is not a cross, but a circular pillar of red sandstone, standing twenty feet high, and covered with interlacing ornament that may be either Saxon or Norman, and is thought by some to be the memorial of a seventh century battle of Tettenhall.

St. Peter's and its surroundings form the pleasantest part of Wolverhampton, and though electric tramways and the press of commerce make the neighbourhood anything but reverend, the lawns and beautiful gardens on whose grass and variegated flowers the ancient tower looks down prove that, although the town is very earnest on the subject of getting on in the world, it does not, for all the striving, forget all those gracious things that make life better worth the living.

Of old times there is little, besides the church, remaining, and the one notable thing, curiously enough, is, or was, connected with the church itself. This is the old Deanery, built in the reign of Charles II., and reminiscent of the time when the oddly conjoined Deanery of Wolverhampton and Windsor lasted, together with the collegiate establishment dissolved in 1846. The Deanery, a grand old mansion of

red brick, standing in its own grounds, is now a Conservative Club.

To ask a catalogue of what they make in modern manufacturing Wolverhampton would mean a lengthy and varied list; but to specialise is an easier task. Locks stand at the head of all products, with more than sixty firms—Chubb's the most generally known—engaged in a weekly output of close upon 400,000 locks; probably as eloquent a testimonial to the world's ingrained dishonesty as anything likely to be advanced. Thirty firms make the attendant keys. Tin-plate working and japanning come next, with cycle-manufacturing; and at the end of a long list of hardware industries, five "soot merchants." There must be great scope for their business in this neighbourhood of the Black Country, and the only wonder is that there are not more of them.

X

Little indeed is left of the Wolverhampton of the coaching era—a fact not very greatly to be regretted, because the old town had no architectural pretensions, but a great many squalid cottages and lanes, of no real interest or antiquity. High Green was the exception. It must be

borne in mind that the Wolverhampton of that time was a very small place compared with the great manufacturing town of to-day, and that the "neat market-town" of Wigstead and Rowlandson's tour in 1797 contained only some 11,000 inhabitants. To-day it numbers 96,000, and extends along the Holyhead Road as far as Tettenhall, a distance of nearly two miles, more than a mile beyond what was, a century ago, the "small village" of Chapel Ash, a place forming now an integral part of the town. High Green was a place well named in the adjectival part of its title, for it occupied the highest part of the commanding ridge on which Wolverhampton was first built. Whatever there was of a green on its site has vanished these centuries ago, and as a market-place it has long been superseded by the great market-buildings near by, and by the Corn Exchange; both erected about 1851. Before that time it was thronged with the stalls of butchers, and with country folk come to sell their vegetables, fruit, eggs, butter, poultry, and other produce. Farmers and corn-dealers met there, in the open air, careless of the weather, as their grandfathers and remote ancestors had done before them, holding forth samples of golden grain in their great outstretched palms, and doing business with a hand-shake and a convivial glass at the "Swan," to the great content of the pigeons that hovered numerously over this then picturesque centre of the old market-town, not yet

transformed by the discovery of the mineral wealth of the district.

The "Lion" was the principal inn of old Wolverhampton. It stood on the site now occupied by the Town Hall, and was originally built about 1750. Thirty coaches a day are said to have changed horses in its yard, or to have started from its doors, and under the sway of Thomas Badger, who died in 1799, and of his successor, Richard Evans, it enjoyed for a long series of years the chief posting business. The yellow-jacketed and black-hatted postboys of the "Lion" for nearly three-quarters of a century rode the pigskin, bumped and plied the whip in front of the best in Staffordshire, Shropshire, and Warwickshire.

Richard Evans was highly successful in the combined parts of coach-master, horse-owner, and innkeeper. The variety of his business was surprising, and his methods matched every shade. He ruled his stable-yards with a passionate storm of objurgatory eloquence, bore himself with a tactful but self-respecting deference to the great ones who honoured his house, was popular with the townspeople who used his assembly-rooms, and at one with the Town Commissioners, a body first established in 1779, and meeting, in those days before Town Halls, under his roof. One of his strange guests was the body of the Duke of Dorset, killed in 1815 in an Irish hunting-field, and brought to England for sepulture with his forefathers in the Sackville

HIGH GREEN, WOLVERHAMPTON, 1797. *After Rowlandson.*

vault at Withyham, in distant Sussex. A kind of lying-in-state, with the public admitted to view, took place at every town where the mournful procession halted. The next year, 1816, Napoleon's travelling carriage, captured after Waterloo, was here, being shown in the stable-yard for a week at sixpence a head to thousands of country-folk and colliers. The pitmen were not content with gloating over the capture: they wanted to mark their hatred of "Boney" by dragging his carriage out and burning it.

Richard Evans in 1821 sold his coaching business to his son, who took it to the newly built "New Hotel" in Bell Street, itself now a thing of the past. Shortly afterwards he relinquished the "Lion" into other hands, but in a few years the old house began to decline. Landlords and landladies succeeded one another at increasingly frequent intervals, and at last it was closed in 1838, to be used for a period partly as a private house and partly as a chemist's shop. The growing dignity of the town and of municipal life had by this time begun to demand the provision of a Town Hall, and it was acquired and altered at a large cost for that purpose, only to be found so highly inconvenient that it was pulled down in 1869 and the building erected that now stands upon the site.

Next in importance to the "Lion" was the "Swan," already mentioned, which stood on the east side of High Green, where Lloyd's Bank

now is. In the old theatre down its yard, built in 1779, the Kembles, Mrs. Siddons, and many another trod the boards, and from the balcony over the "Swan" entrance Daniel O'Connell addressed excited crowds before the passing of the first Reform Bill. Reform, however, did not still political passions, for it was in front of this house that the election riot of 1835 took place, with the result that the military were sent for, the Riot Act read, volleys fired, and several persons — not rioters, but women and children—severely wounded.

It was ill work that destroyed the old "Star and Garter" inn, that stood, a picturesque brick and timber house in Cock Street (since re-named "Victoria Street") until 1834. In that old house, on a night in 1642, Charles I. slept, on his way from Shrewsbury to London, to be intercepted, and his army defeated, at Edge Hill. The inn was rebuilt and opened again in 1836, with a make-believe "King's Room," a spurious bedstead, and such incongruities as portraits of the King and Cromwell on its walls.

Beside these hostelries, and the "Coach and Horses" on Snow Hill, the old inns of Wolverhampton were of a minor sort, where the simpler business-men of those times repaired in the evening to drink a jovial glass and smoke a companionable pipe; to play bowls or quoits and enjoy themselves in what the present generation would consider a very free and easy, not to say low, manner.

HIGH GREEN, WOLVERHAMPTON, 1826. *From an Old Print.*

XI

Perhaps the most striking way of picturing the great changes that have taken place in Wolverhampton in the course of a century is by comparing the different aspects presented by High Green at periods ranging from 1797 to modern times. It has had many changes. Only two features in the series of pictures have remained unaltered during that period: the handsome old brick houses at one corner have survived, and the noble tower of St. Peter's still looks down upon the scene, as it has done for close upon five hundred years. The series opens with Rowlandson's spirited drawing, showing the market in full swing. There are the butchers' and other stalls; there you see a milkmaid, milk-pail on head, and the pack-horse of some country trader in the foreground. On the right hand is a picturesquely gabled, half-timbered shop, selling such incongruous things as toys and oysters: the building covered over with plaster and become an inn, long known as "Cholditch's," by the time the next view, taken in 1826, was drawn.

In that view, the coach, making so stately an exit in the direction of Birmingham and London, is the "Prince of Wales," from Maran's Hotel, Holyhead, to the "George and Blue Boar," Holborn. It reached London from Birmingham by way of Henley-in-Arden, Stratford-on-Avon,

Woodstock, and Oxford. The imposing-looking coachman with the three-caped coat was Miller, said to have been of Dunstall Hall, reduced in circumstances, and driving a coach as to the manner born. As for the monumental structure, like the second cousin to a lighthouse, standing in the middle of the road, that was erected in 1821 by the "Light Committee" of the town, to celebrate the establishment of the first gas-works and to illuminate the Market-place. As a monument it was successful enough, and the patent refracting gas-lamp that crowned it shed a light visible for miles around; but its height was so great that the Market-place itself remained in darkness. It only served to illuminate the bedroom windows of the surrounding houses and light the good folks to bed. The "Big Candlestick," as the pitmen of the neighbourhood called it, was a failure, and, after several proposals had been made to crown the pillar with a statue of the Duke of Wellington, Sir Robert Peel, or other heroes of that time, it was removed in 1842, to be succeeded some years later by that warlike trophy the captured Russian gun, seen in the picture of "High Green, 1860." Railways had then long abolished coaches, and cabs waiting to be hired form a feature of the scene, eloquent alike of altered manners and of Wolverhampton's growth. Some of the houses are also seen to have been rebuilt.

In the "Queen Square" of to-day the gun is replaced by an equestrian statue of the Prince

HIGH GREEN, WOLVERHAMPTON, 1860. *From a Contemporary Photograph.*

Consort: a Gothic stone bank stands on the site of the old inn, and on the right hand stands a newer new building, with sundry other reconstructions and changes. High Green became "Queen Square" from November, 1866, when Queen Victoria unveiled the statue. History does not tell us why the Prince Consort should have been especially honoured at Wolverhampton, which owed him nothing, nor he it. Local association he had none, and in the placing of his effigy here we find only another example of the tiresome excess of loyalty that has planted statues of Royal personages thickly all over the kingdom, and has produced a dreary and unmeaning repetition of "Victoria" and "Albert" squares, streets, stations, museums, and what not, to the blotting out of really interesting local names that had endured for centuries before the wallowing snob came upon the scene, like some evil pantomime sprite.

Electric tramways now run through Queen Square to all parts of this modern and progressive borough, and new streets and new buildings of both a business and a public character have changed the squalid and formless character of the town into something very different; while pleasant suburbs extend far into the country districts.

XII

At Tettenhall the borough of Wolverhampton ends, and with it the Black Country. Crossing over the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal, the road makes direct for Tettenhall Hill, eased in its course by a long embankment in the hollow, and by a deep cutting through the red rocks of the hill-top, but still a formidable rise. The old road, however, was infinitely worse. Its course may still be traced branching off to the left by the "Newbridge Inn," where the old toll-house used to stand, and plunging down into the hollow where Wolverhampton's only watercourse, the Smestow brook, trickles under a narrow bridge, thought to enshrine among its stones some remains of Roman masonry. Thence the old way rose steeply, and went partly through grounds now private, and up "Old Hill," where a bye-road still zig-zags with an extravagant steepness between sheer rocks. Here is the chief part of old Tettenhall village, much the same as it was a hundred years ago, and, with the exception of an ugly modern hotel built on the summit of the rocks, untouched by the life and changes of all the revolutionary years that have passed since Telford cut the new road and left this in a quiet backwater of life.

Tettenhall church and pretty churchyard are cut off from the rest of the village by the modern

Holyhead Road. Half-way up the hillside, and overhung with trees, the old-fashioned rural spot overlooks Wolverhampton, seated in smoky majesty on its ridge.

In the crowded churchyard they show the confiding stranger a stone with the much flattened and battered figure of a woman, and recount

OLD HILL, TETTENHALL.

the legend of it being the memorial of a seamstress who worked on Sundays, and when reproached for it replied that if it were wrong she hoped her arms would drop off. Her arms dropped off accordingly the next Sunday, when plying her needle! The stone is really a much mutilated effigy from some ancient tomb, cast out of the church so long ago that every feature

has been worn away; but it will be noticed that the arms have been hacked off at the shoulders.

On the hill-top is Tettenhall Green, where old road and new meet, and so go past a park and hamlet oddly named "The Wergs" to Wrottesley Park, fenced off for the length of a mile by as ugly a stone wall as it would be possible to find in many a long journey. "The

THE SABBATH-BREAKING SEAMSTRESS.

Wergs" is a corruption of the ancient name "Witheges," itself a mangled form of "withy hedges." It is probable that the name was derived from the sallows with which some early squatter fenced his land, instead of the rude cut-wood fences of primitive times. Wrottesley Hall, burnt in 1896, still lifts its ruined and blackened walls between the trees.

Five miles beyond Wolverhampton, passing the "Foaming Jug" Inn, Staffordshire is left behind, and the borders of Shropshire crossed.

XIII

SHROPSHIRE is the land of the "proud Salopian." Of what, you may ask, is the Salopian proud? It may be doubted, however, if the phrase really means more than that the Shropshireman has ever been high-spirited, jealous of his own good name, and quick to wrath. But he has good cause for pride in the fair shire that held out of old against the Welsh in the hazardous centuries when this was part of the Marches, the Debatable Land where the frontiers shifted hither and thither as the Lords Marchers or the Welsh chieftains warred with varying fortunes, and where the Englishman often sowed, and raiding Taffy came and reaped unbidden. Shropshire bore its part well in those centuries of strife, when the Welsh were continually striving to get back their own; for it should not be forgotten that this also was Wales in the dim background of history. More than eleven hundred years ago the Englishman threw the Welshman back upon his rugged hills and out of these fertile plains, and this became part of the great Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia. Not only

politically a part of that realm, but socially, for war was not an affair of kid gloves in those days, but an affair of race-hatred and extermination, so that when the conquering King Offa had set his rule over what is now Shropshire, those Welshmen who had not fled were slain, and their land occupied by an alien race. So thorough was that change that the very names of the towns and villages were altered, and are either quite forgot or else only survive in the memories of antiquaries. Take a map of England and its neighbouring Wales, and you will find a mysterious earthwork called "Offa's Dyke," traced from near Prestatyn, on the Flintshire coast, to Bridge Sollars, on the Wye in Herefordshire. That was the boundary set up by Offa, "the Terrible." The Shropshire portion of it runs from Chirk, by Llanymynech, Welshpool, Montgomery, and Clun, and to this day not only the place-names, but the people on either side show a distinct cleavage between Saxon and Welsh. In the heart of Shropshire it is difficult to find a trace of the old race. Who but the antiquary knows that before Offa came and seized that town Shrewsbury was "Pengwern"? Yet that was its name. Under the Saxon it became "Scrobbesbyrig," that is to say "Scrub-borough," or the Town in the Bush. Two hundred years after Offa and his kingdom had perished, another fierce personage laid his heavy hand upon the Welsh in this region. This was the Norman, Richard Fitz Scrob, to whom

Edward the Confessor granted what was not his to give, namely, all the land he could seize from the Welsh on the Borders. The curious similarity of his name to that of "Scrobbesbyrig" has often led to the supposition that he built the first castle of Shrewsbury, and that the place took its name from him. But he certainly built Richard's castle, on the border, near Ludlow, one of a chain of more than thirty fortresses designed to keep the as yet unconquerable Welsh in check.

From "Scrobbesbyrig," its capital, Shropshire derived its Saxon name of "Scrobbescire" (pronounced "Shrobshire"), changed in after centuries to its present form; and let it be noted by all who would not earn the contempt of Salopians that the right pronunciation of Shrewsbury follows the derivation, and that to name it as spelled is regarded by all Salopians as a vulgarism. It is "Shrowsbury" to the elect, rhyming with *blows*, not *news*.

The name of "Salop," applied frequently both to shire and county town — whence "Salopian" — is another matter, and difficult of derivation. It comes, say philologists, from "the ancient Erse words, *sa*, a stream, and *lub*, a loop," describing the site of Shrewsbury, encircled as it is by the strange windings of the Severn.

Shropshire remains one of the most exclusive and aristocratic counties in England, as well as one of the wealthiest. It might well have

claimed, not so long since, to be the thirstiest also, the Squire as an institution lived longer here than in most parts, and flourished most. Two generations ago, Salopians of every class had the reputation of being able to drink all others senseless, but that is one of the obsolete virtues.

One topples over the edge of Staffordshire, as it were, into Salop, for here the steep descent of a range of hills leads, by a dramatic transition, from the waterless plateau around Wolverhampton to the valley of the Severn. Summerhouse Hill is the joy of the cyclist bound for Shrewsbury, and the bane of his return; with a mile run down in one direction, and a steady heartbreaking climb in the other. Near the summit is the "Summer House," an inn where the flying "Wonder" of seventy years ago changed horses punctually at 8.16 every morning, on its journey from London to Shrewsbury; and at the foot of the hill, the "Horns" of Boningale. Boningale itself may be sought on a slip road that goes off to the left and returns in a semicircle of five hundred yards: the tiniest village, with a very small church and one very large black-and-white farmhouse, almost as ancient as the church itself. The road onwards is quiet, and unmarked by any outstanding features, save a house at Whiston Cross; Albrighton and other large villages lying a little distance to one side.

Whiston Cross, situated 130¼ miles from London, can claim the distinction of being exactly half-way between London and Holyhead. The house was once an inn, but has long been the place where the Albrighton Hounds are kenneled. In the old days of hard drinking, this and the "Harp" inn at Albrighton were the resorts of a cobbler reputed to be the greatest sot in the neighbourhood. He must have been exceptional, for he scandalised even *these* parts. He was once the victim, when in his cups, of a joke whose echoes still linger mirthfully in the countryside. Senselessly and helplessly drunk, he was driven over to a coalpit at Lilleshall and lowered into its depths. When he came dimly to his senses, he found himself surrounded by a circle of inquisitors, their faces blackened, in an uncanny place, spectrally lighted, and was very soon made to understand that he was dead and come to judgment before a jury of fiends anxious to consign him to a warm corner.

"I don't know why I was brought here," he said miserably, addressing the supposedly satanic tribunal, "and I can assure you, gentlemen, I was once a respectable shoemaker, of Albrighton, in Shropshire."

Beyond Whiston Cross, in Cosford Brook Dingle, the Wolverhampton Waterworks raise their tall chimneys unexpectedly from the surrounding woodlands of Halton Park; the engine houses humming with the machinery that daily

pumps more than three million gallons of water for the use of that enterprising community. In another two miles across the Salopian plain, Shiffnal is reached, and with it the first, and entirely lovable, specimen of a Shropshire town.

XIV

Shiffnal is a little place, changed less in the course of three hundred years than any along this road. Three centuries ago, when it was called "Idsall" quite as often as by its other name, all the town, with the exception of the church, was brand new, and its site with it; for the fire that in 1591 had levelled it with the ground led to the new township being erected a hundred yards or so to the east of the old one.

No fires, however destructive, warned our Elizabethan forbears that timber was a dangerous material to build with, and Shiffnal arose, one mass of timbered houses, and by a happy chance they most of them remain to this day; so that, whether one comes into the town by road, or is swept swiftly over it by train on the Great Western Railway that looks down from a lofty embankment upon the queer old Market-place, the effect is charming indeed. But, lest

SHIFFNAL.

this magpie architecture should, or ever could, look monotonous, there have been introduced, from time to time, buildings in other styles and materials. Down the street, and seen, in fact, before one arrives at the Market-place itself, is, for example, the "Jerningham Arms," stucco-fronted and thrusting forth the elaborate quarterings of the Jerninghams, Lords Stafford, and lords of the manor, ensigned with the Bloody Hand of Ulster, which leads the ignorant to suppose that Allsopp's ales are obtainable within. The "Jerningham Arms" was a coaching inn, and the "Star" (prominent in the illustration, with a skylight on its roof) another, and a handsomer. Behind the fine old red-brick front of that house, and through the archway, the stable yard runs down; the beam over the arch rich in the badges of old fire insurance offices, and above them the sculptured armorial shield of some forgotten county family.

Shiffnal church stands a little apart: a fine red sandstone building with a central tower crowned with a low pyramidical red-tiled roof that only by a little overtops the battlements. Does that sound like a depreciation of it? I hope not, for it is a type characteristically English, and very lovable. One may trace many architectural periods in Shiffnal church, from the Norman when they could not build too heavily, to the Perpendicular, when lightness was coming in. Not that lightness has part or lot here, for the church is stately rather in the

massive masculine way. Within a recess of the chancel wall lies the monumental effigy of Thomas Forster, "sometime Prior of Wombridge, Warden of Tongue and Vicar of Idsall," 1526. In that inscription the old name of the parish is preserved, as it is also on a tablet giving an account of a much more interesting person; a certain William Wakley. It recounts how he "was baptised at Idsall, otherwise Shiffnal, May 1st, 1590, and was buried at Adbaston, November 28th, 1714. His age was 124 years and upwards. He lived in the Reign of eight Kings and Queens." But this ancient's record is surpassed, for the tablet goes on to tell of "Mary, the wife of Joseph Yates, of Lizard Common," who died August 7th, 1776, aged 127 years. "She walked to London just after the fire in 1666, was hearty and strong 120 years, and married a third husband at ninety-two."

Two other curiosities, and we are done with Shiffnal church. The first is the odd Christian name of a woman — "Kerenhapputh" — on a stone in the churchyard: the second a Latin inscription of 1691 on the churchyard wall. It may be Englished thus (the wall supposed to be speaking): "At length I rise again, at the sole expense of William Walford, the kindest of men."

XV

Breasting a long incline of nearly three miles, the road comes to Prior's Lee and Snedshill, and, reaching a commanding crest, looks down upon the industry and turmoil of Lilleshall on the one side, and the equally busy and

SNEDSHILL FURNACES.

industrious Coalbrookdale on the other. The prettiness of Prior's Lee is in name alone. It and Snedshill are wastes of slag and cinder-heaps—some a century old, others the still smoking refuse from the blast-furnaces that roar and whizz and vomit smoke on the left.

But the great iron furnaces of Snedshill are

seen at their most impressive at night. The strange cyclist who has never before known the road sees the reflection of their flames a long way off, and comes upon the scene bewildered by the rising and falling of the lurid light that glows intensely in one direction and sinks all other quarters in an impenetrable obscurity. It is the weirdest of scenes, the surrounding house-fronts and the tower of Prior's Lee church standing out in the radiated glare against the blackest of backgrounds: spouting flames an angry red, turning the white light of arc-lamps down at the ironworks a wicked and debauched-looking blue. Sighings of escaping steam, like the groans of some weary Titan exhausted with labour, rise now and again, and are succeeded by thunderous crashings and huge clouds of steam and smoke, mingled with millions of sparks, as the molten metal is now and again discharged.

To this is added the clattering of coal-waggons where Oakengates and the collieries lie, deep down in the valley, brilliant at night with constellations of lights. In strange contrast with all this, the benighted wayfarer sees roadside cottages whose open doors disclose housewives going about the business of their homes with all the world, as it were, for a background. The sight enforces the thought—how great the little home, how small the vast outside world!

Passing Ketley Station and rising Potter Bank, great banks loom mystically on the left, and bars

of light from wayside inns streak the road. If it be summer night, sounds of glee-singing rise by the way, for the colliers, although this is not Wales, have got musical culture.

But daylight strips Ketley of all possible mysticism, for the soaring banks are then found to be just cinder-heaps, and the depth of the deep valley on the right is not so appalling after all. Most of Ketley's mines are deserted now, but the cinder-heaps are gaunt as ever. Telford drove a new road through the heaps and used vast quantities of the cinders in ballasting and paving it, leaving a portion of the Watling Street, diving down a hollow, on the right. It is still there, with the disreputable roadside cottages beside it, as of old, and the same semi-savage class as ever inhabiting them.

Away in the distance, rising majestically over the miners' rubbish-heaps, comes the whale-like outline of the Wrekin, shaggy and blue-black with pines. Not a great hill, compared with the Stretton Hills and the Welsh mountains presently to come in sight; but its isolated position in the surrounding Shropshire plain gives it a commanding appearance, and has made the Wrekin a centre to which all Salopian hearts fondly turn in response to that old toast, honoured with three times three, "To all friends round the Wrekin." The toast has not so limited an application as those who are not Salopians, or know not Shropshire, might imagine, for the Wrekin is visible from incredible distances, and

the view *from* it comprises not only the whole of Shropshire, but a radius of distant hills sweeping the horizon round from Malvern, the Warwickshire Edge Hill, the Peak in Derbyshire, the mountains about Llangollen, the Berwyns, Cader Idris, and Plinlimmon, to the Brecon Beacons.

The famous hill rises only 1,260 feet above the surrounding plain, but just because it *is* a plain, its Protean bulk looms larger and loftier than many a taller eminence. Protean the Wrekin is because the outline of it, viewed from different quarters, varies singularly. Whale-like from Wellington, from the south-west it looks like a truncated sugar-loaf, and seen from the road near Wroxeter resembles a huge and shapely dome.

Wellington lies a mile distant from the road, but straggling outposts of houses extend all the way, and at Cock Corner one may look down the cross-road and clearly perceive the existence of the town and what manner of town it is. To coaching travellers Wellington was but a name and a distant mass of roofs; for, with but two minutes to change horses at the "Cock" —or, if they travelled by the famous Shrewsbury "Wonder," a minute at Haygate inn, a mile onward—they were gone, and roofs and chimneys sank, as though by magic, beyond the rounded fields and tall hedgerows.

The "Cock" has remained game to the present day, and has witnessed the disappearance

of its once prosperous neighbour, the "Holly-bush." That picturesquely named inn was a coaching house of a humbler sort, and carriers and coal-waggoners made it a house of call. Now a private house, brilliantly whitewashed, it seems by that dazzling raiment to have put away, as far as possible, all coaly memories.

XVI

HAYGATE INN stands, just as does the "Cock," at the fork of a bye-road leading to Wellington. The "Cock" caught the travellers from London, the "Falcon" (which was really the sign of Haygate inn, although few knew it by any other name than that already mentioned) those from Wales and Shrewsbury. It was intimately connected with the Shrewsbury "Wonder," being kept by H. J. Taylor, a brother of Isaac Taylor of the "Lion" at Shrewsbury, who put that famous coach upon the road in 1825. Another brother kept the chief inn at Shiffnal, and so between them they kept the hotel and coaching business in the family along the first eighteen miles from Shrewsbury.

When the "Falcon" was rebuilt, in the flush of the coaching age, it was built to outlast the requirements of rich and jovial posting and coaching travellers for at least a century to come. So much is evident at sight of the house, substantially constructed and designed

with all the dignity of a private mansion. Alas! for all such anticipations; the first railway train rolled into Shrewsbury Station in 1839, and shortly afterwards the house became what it is now—a farmstead.

Haygate derived its name from "the Haye of Wellington," and was a gate into the forest

HAYGATE INN.

of the Wrekin in ancient times. Nothing remains of that forest; the pine-trees that now clothe the Wrekin were planted on what was then a bare hillside in the early years of the last century.

Down this road that once led into the forest glades in one direction, and to Wellington in

the other, the town is soon reached. Shropshire has few places so uninteresting, and its modesty in thus secluding itself from the old turnpike is therefore not misplaced. The narrow and devious streets of the town are not excused by their houses, almost without exception ugly and dull. A duller and uglier church, very "classic" and grimy, fitly lords it over those secular buildings, and looks down upon the railway station, placed in a cutting in the very centre of the town. A portion of the churchyard, indeed, was cut away to form the site of that station. A depressing monument, as pagan and as "classic" as the church, stands prominent among the humbler tombs. It is black-painted and gilt, like a jeweller's show-case, and forms a canopy or shrine over an urn that does *not* contain the ashes of the Reverend John Eyton, who died in 1823, and is commemorated in a very long epitaph. He lies below, and the urn is merely decorative: just of a piece with the rest of the pagan affectation around. The author of that epitaph was evidently not one who "damned with faint praise." But listen to the virtues of the departed:—

> As a Christian Pastor he was vigilant, affectionate, and faithful; unweariedly devoted to the concerns of the fold, gathering the lambs with his arm, and daily feeding the flock committed to his charge. And now, while the Chief Shepherd places upon his Head a crown of glory that will never fade away ——."

And so forth. Another side of the momument takes up the tale, and tells us what manner of cleric this was:

> A man of whose character and endowments it is difficult to speak in any other language than that of admiration and reverence. His person and appearance interesting and attractive. His deportment and manners graceful and engaging. His intellectual and sacred attainments so various, so extensive, and so captivating as to render him everywhere the Desire and Delight of his edified associates."

All these advantages and virtues did not avail him much for preferment, for he never became a Right Reverend. And yet this surely would have been the man for a Bishopric. Nay, Primates could be no more—and are commonly less.

XVII

Regaining the old turnpike at Haygate Inn, the Wrekin broods monstrous on the scene for miles to come, its central bulk reinforced by Ercall to the left, and little attendant Wrekins, crowned with fir-trees, on the right. In midst of this comes Burcot toll-house, situated on a lonely rise, where cross-roads seem to butt up against the great hill on one side and disappear into a valley on the other. This toll-house

may well compare for size and solidity with any on the way from London to Holyhead; but why it should, and why a shield carved in stone, and inscribed "W.T., 1835," should especially distinguish it from its fellows, are things now hid from mortal ken. Nor has "W.T." achieved the fame he evidently desired, for the initials—to whomsoever they really belonged—are commonly and erroneously ascribed to Telford, whose Christian name was Thomas.

THE WREKIN.

From this point, for a distance of nearly two miles, Telford made what were described in the published projects of that time as "sundry valuable improvements." He planned and carried out a new line of road through the shoulder of Overley Hill, so that the coaches, instead of toiling over its crest, went through a short piece of rocky cutting below, and left so much of the old Roman road to solitude and decay. Coming from Shrewsbury, even

this improved road remains a weary drag; the summit and its little group of villas gained with joy.

Below and beyond comes the Wrekin again, brooding vengefully over the smiling vale, and in wind and storm spreading a greater blackness over the scene: at all times giving a sombre cast to the long straight reaches of the Watling Street. There it has sat, moodily reminiscent, since time began to be. Geologists, who have their reasons for so doing, describe it as "a mass of eruptive greenstone," and say the Wrekin is "the oldest mountain in England." Therefore it may well be reminiscent. It has seen mankind emerge from the primeval ooze and floating as invertebrate jelly-fishes in the inland sea that washed its base, and has watched the family history from that interesting era to the present time; through the period of the arboreal ancestor, when the jelly-fishes acquired backbones and prehensile tails and took, as monkeys, to climbing trees; and unless some of the glorified monkeys come meanwhile as engineers and quarry it off the face of the earth, or blast it away, it will probably see the race itself follow the lead given by the governments of this country during the last sixty years, and resume the condition of invertebrata, wallowing in the slime.

The Wrekin has seen the Stone Age, the Bronze Age, the coming of the Romans and the going of them; saw the first clearings in

the primeval forest, the subjected Britons slaving under Roman taskmasters at the making of the Watling Street, and the brief period, centuries later, of coaching. It has looked down over the vale these last sixty years upon the railway, and the time is ripe for another change. Perhaps we are on the threshold of it.

It is very still and peaceful on the Roman road, and the traveller has it and its memories wholly to himself. Among those memories is the sad story of Robert Bolas, of Uppington, yonder where the church tower and the hedgerow elms occupy the middle distance, with the Wrekin for background.

Robert Bolas came of an old and respected family in Uppington, but that fact did not serve to keep him honest, and it seems that he had long made a practice of stealing wheat from a farm between his village and Wroxeter. It all happened very long ago, but the tale is not likely to be forgotten.

The gradual shrinkage of his grain made the owner, a farmer named Witcomb, suspicious, and, with a man named Matthews, he kept a watch. Bolas duly appeared, with an empty sack over his shoulder, which he was proceeding to fill when Witcomb and Matthews made to seize him. Bolas then picked up a bill-hook, and attacking them so furiously that Matthews was killed and Witcomb left for dead, made off. But it so happened that Witcomb recovered, and the affair, that had in the meanwhile created

a great stir in the neighbourhood, was explained. For some reason on another, Bolas was confident of an acquittal, and cheerfully told his friends he would be home in time to harvest his barley.

But they found him guilty, hanged him at Shrewsbury, and gibbeted his body here by the roadside; and so, although, after a fashion, he came home again, other hands reaped his bearded grain. The thing made so strong an impression upon the countryside that the phrase, "Don't make so sure of your barley," became proverbial.

All these things happened in 1722. Matthews was buried in Wellington Churchyard, where his tombstone, stating that he was "barbarously murdered," stood until the railway came and swept it and others away. "Bolas's Gibbet" long remained a landmark beside the Holyhead Road, a weatherworn stump bristling with the rusty fragments of nails that had been driven into the post so that it should not be climbed and the body removed. That "the evil that men do lives after them" was exemplified shortly after the body of Bolas came home and was hung upon the gibbet. There still stands, not a great way ahead, an old roadside "public," the "Horseshoes," where the road forks to Wroxeter. Here, one dismal night, several youths were drinking and joking, when the conversation turned upon Bolas. Each dared the others to go in the dark to the lonely spot and ask the dead man how he felt, and as no

one was sufficiently courageous to go alone, they set off a body. On the way, one more mischievous than the rest drew off unperceived, and hid in the hedgerow beneath the gruesome object.

"How are you to-night?" asked the little group, keeping very close together, and sorry they had come.

"Very cold and chilly," answered a pitiful voice; and immediately they all took to their heels. One suffered such a shock that he became a raving maniac.

XVIII

WROXETER lies within a short distance, but only approached along a narrow and uneven lane. Its fine church-tower looks down upon little more than a few farms and bartons; for village, as generally understood, there is none. This simple rural place, aromatic with hay and straw and corn, is the representative of, and takes its name from, the great Roman city of *Uriconium*, one-third larger than Pompeii, destroyed by the fury of savage hordes more than fourteen hundred years ago. The City of *Uriconium*—the "City of the Wrekin"—was established shortly after A.D. 48, when the Roman general, Ostorius Scapula, had driven

out the British tribes. He set an important station here, at a crossing of the Watling and the Ikenild Streets, and the place not only served as an armed camp to guard the roads and the ford of the Severn, but grew to be the most important market along the road to Wales. It lasted four hundred years, and only fell some forty years after the Romans had deserted Britain. *Uriconium* was then taken by the combined onslaughts of the Welsh tribes, and

THE "OLD WALL."

burnt to the ground, and the Romanised British who had remained were all massacred.

To this great city, its site now under corn and grass land, and inhabited by a handful of peasants, the Roman road led, on its way to Wales and the shores of the Menai, and to its site still leads, but beyond is lost, save to those who study archæology. The only relics left on the spot to tell of that vanished place are the two Roman pillars standing before the

church; the font, made out of a carved capital; and that massive fragment of masonry, the Old Wall, standing once in the centre of the city, but now solitary in a field.

WROXETER CHURCH.

Superstition brooded for ages upon this spot, and weird legends were created by the terrors the lonely place had for the ignorant of other times. Dead and gone Romans, who had

perhaps, been very matter-of-fact and commonplace persons in their lives, and gifted with all the small virtues of the hearth-loving citizen, loomed large, menacing, and supernatural before those whose business took them near the ruin, and so it was not until modern times that much was done to unearth what relics might lie deep down below the earth deposited by the changes of so long a period.

It was in 1859 that two acres of land were excavated. What did they find? Many things. Fragments of the red Samian ware on which the Roman citizens served their banquets, and whence they pledged one another, drinking to the eternity of Rome. A rusty key without a lock, and a stylus among bones, wine-cups, and scattered coins; the wooden tablets it wrote upon perished, like the hand that held it. The figure of a cock, modelled in lead, once a child's toy, and near it the skeleton of a child, doubtless the one that owned that ancient plaything. Three skeletons of older persons were found, crouched up in one of the underground hypocausts. A hypocaust was a basement chamber, constructed to heat a room or house. Into one of these places those persons had fled when the barbarians stormed the city. They intended to creep out when danger was past, but the place was fired, and they perished in their hiding-place. Two of these fugitives were women; the other an old man. Within his grasp lay a pile of Roman coins, 142 in all,

and, beside them, all that was left of his cash-box—some fragments of wood and rusty nails.

Roofing-slates, still with nails in many of their holes, were discovered in the ruins; the slate, by its appearance, judged to have been brought from Bettws-y-Coed. Millstones for grinding corn, and a charred heap of the corn itself, were found; brooches, seals, household gods, and fragments of the innumerable intimate articles of everyday life. Even some careless scribbling, such as that often found on the walls of Pompeii, was seen; but before it could be protected some graceless excursionists among the thousands carried by rail at that time to see the novelty of a buried city, obliterated it with their walking-sticks.

The two acres then explored, with the little that has been done since, give the impression that if the three-miles' circuit of the walls could be excavated, results surpassing the finds at Silchester might be attained.

From Wroxeter, crossing the Severn, the Watling Street went by the two Strettons Wattlesborough, taking its name from being situated on the great road; *Rutunium*, now Rowton; thence to *Mediolanum* at the crossing of the river Tanad, under the Breidden, a site now called Clawdd Coch, or "Red Ditch"; *Mons Heriri*, under the shadow of Snowdon (whose Welsh name is Eryri, or Eagles' Mountain) at the ancient earthwork known as

Tomen-y-Mur, in the Vale of Maentwrog; and to the sea-coast at *Segontium*, identified with Caer Seiont, near Carnarvon. A branch, with stations of the way at *Bovium* (Bangor-ys-Coed); *Deva*, the great fortress of the Twentieth Legion, identical with Chester, on the Dee; *Varae*, the modern Bodfari; and *Conovium*, by the Conway (Caer Hên, or Old Fort), traversed the Dee estuary and the coast-line looking out to Anglesey and the Irish Sea.

XIX

Returning from Wroxeter and passing the tiny hamlet of Norton, the way lies flat to Shrewsbury. Flat, because we are now come beside the Severn (which no Welshman calls anything else than Sivern). Away across the watery plain as we advance are the Stretton Hills on the left, volcanic and mountainous in outline, blue and beautiful in colour; and, more distant, ahead, far beyond Shrewsbury, the Breidden Hills, a great bulk starting from the level without any disguise of foothills or preliminary rises to detract from their dramatic effect.

The Tern, a tributary of the Severn, crosses the road beneath a handsome stone balustraded bridge, with views to the right over Attingham Park and along the road, through a mass of

overarching trees, toward the village of Atcham. There, in the Park, stands the classical stone building of Attingham Hall, one of those places built a century or more ago at incredible expense, and only to be maintained at a cost far exceeding the resources available to-day. Corn at 50*s*. and 60*s*. a quarter built many fine mansions, and nowadays corn at 25*s*. keeps them empty. Attingham Hall lacks a tenant. It belongs to Lord Berwick, whose title does not, by the way, come from the only Berwick commonly known—the town of Berwick-on-Tweed—but from Berwick Maviston, close by Atcham, the old home of the extinct Malvoisin or Mayvesin family.

The chief entrance to Attingham Park is through the great archway in Atcham village. One side of the village street is made up of church, school-house, post office, a deserted coaching inn, and a number of rustic cottages; the other is the long brick wall of the Park, densely overhung with trees, on to which the village blankly looks. The only opening in this wall is the great archway aforesaid; very tall, Doric, and stony. With a spinal shiver the stranger, who stands wondering awhile where he has seen its like, suddenly realises the resemblance it bears to the entrance of certain great London cemeteries. The arch is flanked by a stag on one side and by a pegasus on the other, with the inscription in gigantic lettering in between: "Qui uti scit ei bona." A very

proper aspiration; but it is just as well that tramps are innocent as a rule of Latin, or they might not inaptly call and ask for something on account.

Opposite this gateway stands what was once the "Talbot," a first-class posting-house. It looks on to the church in one direction, the entrance to the Park in another, and down upon the Severn in a third, so that its situation is by no means commonplace. When the altered conditions of travelling rendered it no longer possible to carry on a remunerative business here, the hotel was converted into a private mansion, and the gravelled drive walled in and turfed, but it has only been occupied for short periods and has long stood empty. Like the Princess in the fairy tale, it waits and still waits, looking up the road and down the road and over the bridge for the expected. It is weary waiting, and even the rats and mice who lived royally in old times, and were reduced at last to the pitiful expedient of subsisting on the faint smell of what *had* been, gave it up and lived on one another. The ultimate survivor is believed to have committed suicide in the Severn.

It is a noble bridge that spans the river here, and, built before the art—no, *not* the art, the science—of constructing bridges in iron was understood, is of stone, and very steep. This steepness added to its narrow proportions was a terror to those nervous coach-passengers whose

faith in Sam Hayward of the "Wonder" was not what it should have been, considering the consummate art he displayed as a whip. But possibly they thought that all the artistry in the world would be of little use to save them and the coach if, on one of the wintry nights and mornings when the Severn mists had obscured the road, they came into collision with the parapets and so were hurled into the swirling river; and, moreover, the hours—5.30

ATCHAM BRIDGE.

in the morning and 10 at night—when the "Wonder" passed this dangerous spot, are not those when courage is high and confidence greatest.

It is a gentle rise from here to Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, passing on the way the old toll-house of Emstrey Bank. On the hill-top, and looking down the Foregate from the summit of his Doric column, stands the statue of "old Rowley." The personage owning that

nickname was Sir Rowland, afterwards Lord Hill, Field-Marshal and Commander-in-Chief in succession to Wellington. As a Peninsula and Waterloo hero, and a brother-in-arms of Welling-

LORD HILL'S MONUMENT.

ton, Shropshire people held him in great honour, for was he not also a Salopian—one of the Hills of Hawkstone—and a fine representative of the county? It was left to a descendant to bankrupt

the estate and disperse the medals, warlike relics, and trophies of Hawkstone Park.

It is perhaps not the sculptor's fault, but a result of distance and acute perspective, that the gallant general on his elevated post bears an extraordinary likeness to Pecksniff, as pictured by Phiz.

Abbey Foregate must have been the place where Benjamin Disraeli, travelling post to Shrewsbury in June 1839, in company with Sir Philip Rose, to fight for one of the two Parliamentary seats the borough then retained, had his attention drawn by his companion to a huge poster, displayed on the walls of a roadside barn. Disraeli was standing in the Conservative interest, and was at the time head over ears in debt.

"Something about you," said Rose to his companion, as his eye lighted on the poster. The chaise was stopped, and Disraeli, deliberately adjusting an unnecessary eye-glass — for the bill was set in the boldest and blackest of "display" type—slowly read it from beginning to end.

It began, "Judgment Debts of Benjamin Disraeli, Tory Candidate for Shrewsbury," and unfolded a long, long list of creditors and the amounts due to them. After long and careful consideration of the lengthy roll, Disraeli turned to his friend, and calmly said: "How accurate they are. Now let us go on."

Shrewsbury was apparently not so scandalised

as it should have been by this revelation of Disraeli's financial straits, for the electors returned both himself and the other Conservative candidate by thumping majorities.

The Foregate, a broad thoroughfare outside the town walls, was an early suburb on the hither shore of the Severn, which comes winding again athwart the road, presenting, when such things were matters of the first importance, a defence that not the boldest might pass. Whoever held Shrewsbury, girdled by river and ramparted walls for fully seven-eighths of a circle, and with the remaining eighth, the only easy approach, blocked by the frowning dark red turrets of its great castle, was master of the situation. Hence that race between Henry IV. and Hotspur for possession of the town in 1403; a race won by the King, who flung his army into it a day before Hotspur's Northumbrians and Scots came in sight; hence, too, the repeated attempts of the Welsh to gain possession.

Foregate still keeps something of its old suburban character, the old-fashioned houses partaking both of town and country; curious old inns neighbouring stately mansions, and village shops shouldering the doctor's or the lawyer's staid Queen Anne and Georgian residences. But the great feature is the Abbey Church, great even though only a fragment of its former self. Ruddy sandstone of a particularly deep, almost blood-red, hue gives its

massive and time-worn tower a suggestion of Shrewsbury's sanguinary history; just as the great bulk of the Abbey may have been the measure of the sins of that Roger de Montgomery, Earl of Shrewsbury, who founded it and died, a world-renouncing monk, within these walls in 1094. Close upon two hundred years later, in 1283, the first English Parliament was held in the Chapter House; and that would be a place of much historic interest to-day, but, like most of the monastery buildings, it has been destroyed.

XX

"Shrowsbury," as already noted, is the correct pronunciation of the name of Shropshire's capital; a mode that still follows the structure of the Saxon place-name, "Scrobbesbyrig." But it is not reasonable to suppose that the outlander who has never been to Shrewsbury should know all the rights and wrongs of the case, and though it may grate upon the Salopian to hear strangers talk of "Shroosbury," he can have no possible remedy until he procures a reform in the spelling of the word. Meanwhile, the outlander aforesaid is often severely entreated for his solecism. Sometimes, too, he deserves all he gets, as for example when, somewhere about

1894, the author of "Pictures in Parliament" taunted a Shropshire member with using a "Salopian pronunciation which for some time hid from the ordinary member a knowledge that he was alluding to Shrewsbury." It did *not* hide the identity, and moreover, no Salopian ever did or could use any other pronunciation. Now, if that member had said "Salop" there would have been more room for criticism, although by that name Shrewsbury is just as often known in Shropshire. It may be presumed that every one knows the county to be often so-called, but it is a novelty for strangers in these gates to hear the word applied to the town. To this day the railway booking-clerks for at least twenty miles round Shrewsbury are commonly asked for tickets to "Salop," and the very milestones adopt the same name. The Earls of Shrewsbury, on the other hand, are (it may not be generally known) miscalled by that title, and are really Earls of Salop. Not, let it be noted, of the town of Salop, but of the *county;* as seen in the original patent of nobility granted to the ancestral Talbot in 1442. But, although there is not the shadow of a warrant for their adoption of the "Shrewsbury" title, they appear never to have used any other, and in literature, from Shakespeare downwards, the same custom has always been observed. But why? Is it possible that the ill meaning of the French word "Salop" has forbidden the use?

The town presents a bold front from this side of the river, crossed in these peaceful times without let or hindrance by the English Bridge, a beautiful seven-arched stone structure built in 1774. It looks not a little foreign when viewed from the river-banks, with the osier-grown islands in mid-stream; houses and church spires clustered beyond, and the Castle turrets

THE ENGLISH BRIDGE.

closing the view on the right; while the approach over the bridge discloses a street so steep that it fills the untravelled Londoner with as much astonishment as it did the lawyer come to Shrewsbury for the first time by the "Wonder" coach. "I think I'll get off," he said nervously, touching Hayward on the arm.

"You be d——d!" shortly replied that past

master of the whip and ribbons, as, springing his team up the hill, he brought the coach round in a circular course, and, shooting his wheelers and pointing his leaders, made with the certainty of an arrow through the archway, and into the stony courtyard of the "Lion."

The hill leading in this astonishing fashion into Shrewsbury is Wyle Cop, the main thoroughfare in old days. Its name, meaning "Hill-top," is sufficiently descriptive. The "Lion" still stands on the summit, on the left hand, its coach-entrance yawning as of old; the streets, as narrow as ever, giving point to Sam Hayward's clever feat of coachmanship.

"Pleasant and chatty," says one who frequented the Holyhead Road in those days, "was Ash, the guard of the 'Wonder' coach, but the coachman, one of two brothers, Hayward* by name, could by no means be so called. The other brother drove the Holyhead Mail. The coachman of the 'Wonder' was grimly silent. 'I will wager,' said one of this taciturn Jehu's passengers to another, 'that you don't

* The authority here quoted says "Hodgson," but that is an error. Nor even was there a Hodgson driving the Holyhead Mail, but a guard of that name who accompanied it on to Holyhead. Many of the statements made by writers on old coaching days are, indeed, surprisingly inaccurate, even when they have been contemporary with those times. Thus, Colonel Corbett sanctions the frontispiece to his *Old Coachman's Chatter*, showing the "Wonder" from London ascending Wyle Cop at one minute to twelve, noon. The "Wonder" reached Shrewsbury at 10.30 every night; the midday coach was the Holyhead Mail.

get a word out of him from the "Hen and Chickens" at Birmingham to the "Lion" at Shrewsbury, barring a pure answer to a question.'" The bet was won, for Hayward kept silence all the way.

But he was no misanthrope. A naturally cheerful nature was overlaid by an undue sense of responsibility to the proprietors of the "Wonder," whose law was "ten miles an hour, including stoppages; or put the paint-brush over the name of the 'Wonder' on the dickey." Had his road not been one of the best in the world—true almost to the spirit-level, and constructed of hard dhu-stone—he could not have kept that excellent time, day by day, and from year to year. As it was, the doing of it absorbed the man's very existence. He might hum an air to himself, but talk he would not.

"What the deuce ails you, Hayward?" asked one of his box passengers, "are you dumb, man?"

Then the Sphinx broke silence: "Can't drive and talk, too," he said; and, closing his mouth like a steel trap, spoke no more.

That he was not only a master of the ribbons, but also of a peculiar feat in driving, has already been hinted. This exploit, only once known to be attempted by any other,* was repeated every time he brought the "Wonder" into Shrewsbury, and never failed to draw an appreciative knot of spectators, or to transfix with horror any

* Stephen Howse, of the Ludlow night mail, was the hero of that occasion. He was born in 1809, and died in 1888.

strangers who might chance to be among the outside passengers. There was always some difficulty in driving up the steep and narrow Cop and into the "Lion" yard, standing on the near side. Other coachmen quartered slowly up, and then, having first drawn to their off side, turned carefully across and slowly piloted their teams through the narrow entrance of the "Lion." Hayward's method was radically different. Galloping up the hill and almost scraping the near-side kerb, he would pass the inn, and then, suddenly thonging his leaders, smartly turn them round in their own length opposite the street called "Dogpole." Then, calling to the "outsides" to "mind their heads," he would drive the coach at a trot into the yard, with an inch to spare.

When the "Wonder" was driven off the London road, and became only a two-horse coach, running between Shrewsbury and Birmingham, Hayward drove the "Greyhound" between Shrewsbury and Aberystwith. Then, following the example of Tony Weller, he "took a widow and a pub." This house, the "Raven and Bell," next door to the "Lion," was long since pulled down. He died November 1st, 1851, but his widow was still in business in 1856. Hayward lies near the scene of his daily exploit, in the churchyard of St. Julian's, under the shadow of the square tower seen in the accompanying view of Wyle Cop. The flowers bloom fresh at the head of his grave.

XXI

COACHING enterprise, from the earliest to the latest days of the coaching era, flourished better at Shrewsbury than any other town along the Holyhead Road. An early mention of public coaches is found in Sir William Dugdale's diary under date of May 2nd, 1659, when he says :— "I set forward towards London by the Coventre coach," and is followed in June, 1681, by a reference to a journey from London to his country seat in Warwickshire by the "Shrewsbury coach." This was an extremely deliberate conveyance. It trundled as far as Woburn the first evening and stopped there the night, for at that period when the state of the country was unsettled, and roads uncertain, and infested with bad characters, no one thought of travelling after sundown. The second evening it lay at Hillmorton, near Rugby, and thence proceeded, on the third day, to Coleshill. Sir William alighted there, leaving the coach to reach Shrewsbury by way of Sutton Coldfield, Aldridge Heath, and Wellington in another two days.

By the light of later coaching history, which shows that coaches between London and Shrewsbury were established principally at Shrewsbury to go to London—proving that the desire of country folk for the metropolis was greater than that of Londoners for the country—it would

seem that this pioneer coach was also a Shrewsbury venture. It probably did not continue long, for even sixty years later Pennant describes how the able-bodied rode horse-back to London, while the rich, who were the only people who travelled frequently, had their own carriages, leaving a very inconsiderable and uncertain number to support a regular conveyance. Thus it is that in 1730, when three Shrewsbury ladies visited the capital, we find them riding horseback, escorted by five gentlemen and six servants. Such goods as then passed between the two places came and went by pack horses, and it is not until 1737 that another glimpse of vehicles plying regularly along the road is obtained. From Shrewsbury in that year began the long-drawn journeys of the "Gee-ho," whose establishment was due to a very shrewd and enterprising soldier, appropriately named Carter. He had been billeted at the "Pheasant," on Wyle Cop, where the pack horse business was then located. and so enslaved the heart of the widowed Mrs. Warner, who kept the inn, that she married him. The old house is still on Wyle Cop, changed only in name, and that only by an addition. It is now the "Lion and Pheasant."

The "Gee-ho" in part supplemented, but in greater measure supplanted, the pack horses. It was chiefly intended to carry goods, and was drawn by eight horses, which, with an extra couple to pull it out of the sloughs, brought the lumbering and creaking vehicle to or from

London in seven, eight, or nine days, according to the condition of the roads.

Even in 1749, twelve years later, we do not find the failure of the first stage-coach of 1681 forgotten, for a certain Pryce Pugh, who was then landlord of what his advertisement calls the "Red Lion on Wild Cop," in drawing attention to his house, mentions room for a hundred horses, and notes the starting of a stage-waggon for London, but says nothing of a coach. The horses, doubtless, were post-horses for riders.

But if passengers were still scarce and not worth the provision of a coach, something could be done, and was done, to expedite the waggons, so that passengers and goods could be conveyed at once. Imagine, then, the stir created by the announcement on October 22nd, 1750, that the "Shrewsbury Flying Stage-waggon will begin to fly on Tuesday next, in five days, winter and summer." They were, of course, only the poorer classes who were thus catered for—people who had no objection to being wedged in between the rolls of Welsh flannel, the butter and lard, and miscellaneous consignments being conveyed; or else we should not in the same year find a lady, anxious to reach London, riding twenty-two miles to Ivetsey Bank, across country, to catch the Chester and London stage-coach, which, taking six days over the whole journey, would not have brought her to town any sooner.

But times now began to move rapidly, and the close of 1750 saw a new conveyance on the

road. This was the "Caravan," an affair greatly resembling modern gipsy-vans, and fitted up inside with benches for eight, twelve, or even, at a pinch, eighteen persons. It was drawn by "six able horses," and professed to reach London in four days, but often occupied the whole of five. If it had taken the direct way, instead of wandering off to the Chester road, this promise could have been kept, as it was in 1752, when the proper way was adopted, and Birmingham reached the first night. The fare to London by the "Caravan" was 15*s*.

The roads were then, under the operation of various Turnpike Acts and the General Highway Act of 1745, beginning to lay aside something of their pristine horrors, and Shrewsbury coaching enterprise was once more aroused to great issues. In April, 1753, the "Birmingham and Shrewsbury Long Coach, with six able horses, in four days," started from the "Old Red Lion" (the "Lion," Wyle Cop), and went to the "Bell," Holborn. The fare was only 18*s*., not more than 5*s*. over and above the price of a third-class railway journey that nowadays takes you either way in something less than three hours and three-quarters. Competition began at Shrewsbury in less than three months after the establishment of the "Long Coach," for in the following June Fowler's "Shrewsbury Stage-coach in three and a half days" began to set out from the "Raven and Bell" to the "George and White Hart," Aldersgate Street; fare one guinea, outside half-

price. It is not on record how these rivals regarded one another, but they seem to have continued, each going to London once a week, for thirteen years before circumstances warranted the intrusion of a third.

In April, 1764, however, a "Machine" was started, to go three times a week and do the journey in two days, at a fare of 30*s*. The continually increasing fares up to this point were balanced by the lower hotel expenses on the shorter time taken, and so the "Machine" became popular in summer. But this celerity of motion could not be sustained during the winter, when the journey was extended to three days. In the spring of 1765, when it returned to its fine weather rapidity, it received the name of the "*Flying* Machine," with the fare raised to 36*s*.; but in August, 1772, when its time was reduced to one and a half days, the price came down by a couple of shillings. The reason for this combined acceleration of pace and reduction of fare is instantly apparent—opposition was threatened. It came with the spring of the following year, but did not directly challenge the supremacy of the "Flying Machine," for the "new Flying Machine," as it was called, by John Payton, of Stratford-on-Avon, and Robert Lawrence, of the "Raven and Bell," Shrewsbury, took the Stratford-on-Avon and Oxford route to London, was half a day longer on the journey, and charged 2*s*. more. The proprietors of the original "Flying Machine" must have

felt relieved when those particulars were disclosed; but their nerves received a worse shock in the spring of 1774, for the confederates who had started the "new Flying Machine" re-named it the "London and Shrewsbury New Fly," and announced several alterations and improvements. It was to perform the journey in a day and a half, to go three times a week, and, fitted "quite in the modern taste" and with steel springs, it offered decided advantages over the old favourite. In addition came the unkind announcement that, "notwithstanding the Fly sets out after the old coach, it will be in London as soon." How sweet a sop for lazy travellers, none too eager to rise, and how bitter the taunt to the old firm!

It is not to be supposed that they tamely submitted to this impudence. Their reply was soon forthcoming. It stated that the proprietors of the "original London and Salop Machine," in the modern taste, on steel springs (the Machine, not the proprietors) and bows on the top," called upon all travellers to observe "that the road through Coventry, being several miles nearer than through Oxford, will fully demonstrate the most speedy conveyance to London." The "bows on the top" were seats for the outsides, who, if carried before, must have been accommodated in the "basket," a wicker-work structure, hung on behind. Unfortunately for the "original," it had very determined competitors to deal with. Its business suffered, just as, thirteen years before, it had come upon

the scene and cut up the trade of the "Long Coach" and Fowler's "Shrewsbury Stage."

The rivals even put on another conveyance, the "Diligence" they called it, conveying three

WYLE COP AND THE "LION"

passengers at the express speed of Shrewsbury to London in one day, at £1 11*s.* 6*d.* each. This startling innovation was announced to go three times a week.

There were thus in 1776 three modes of getting to London. Rivalry, however, had outrun custom, and discretion had far out-distanced both. The "Original" slipped back to a two days' journey, twice a week, the "Fly" dropped one weekly journey during the winter, and the "Diligence" soon ceased to run at all.

But Robert Lawrence, the landlord of the "Raven and Bell," and partner in the newer coaching enterprises with Payton, of Stratford-on-Avon, was a remarkable man. Given a wider sphere of action, there is no knowing to what greatness he might have developed. As it was, he did much for Shrewsbury in his time, and greatly influenced the traffic along the Holyhead Road, from end to end. The route had until then been invariably by way of Chester; but the casual inspection of any map will soon show that that city lies at a considerable distance to the north of a direct line drawn from London to Holyhead, and that Shrewsbury is placed much more centrally. It occurred to Lawrence that the difficulties and dangers of the route by what we now call the Holyhead Road, *viâ* Llangollen and Capel Curig, were much exaggerated, and that time might be saved and the dangerous ferry (as it then was) of Conway missed by avoiding Chester altogether. In that case Shrewsbury would regain much of the trade that belonged to it by virtue of its geographical position.

These prime facts grasped, Lawrence set

himself to alter the course that traffic had taken for centuries, and devoted his life to this one aim. It was, as may readily be supposed, no easy matter, and he was obliged to begin his reforms slowly. Thus, on July 3rd, 1779, we find him setting up a post-coach to Holyhead by Wrexham, Mold, St. Asaph, and Conway, three times a week, and in one and a half days, in conjunction with other innkeepers. The fare was £2 2*s*.

This ceased in 1783, but in the meanwhile, in conjunction with some London innkeepers, he had started the first stage-coach to perform the whole journey between London and Holyhead. This was established in May, 1780, going through Coventry, Castle Bromwich, Birmingham, Walsall, Wolverhampton, Shrewsbury, Llangollen, Corwen, Llanrwst, and Conway. In November of that year Lawrence removed from the "Raven and Bell" to the "Lion," next door, a larger house, and announced his determination to pursue with unremitting industry the object he had in view, of securing the Chester traffic for Shrewsbury.

This bold pronouncement roused the Chester proprietors and the innkeepers along that route to fury. They threatened Payton with opposition to his Birmingham, Oxford, and London coaches if he did not break his connection with Lawrence, and when Payton declined to listen to them, established themselves as a confederacy at the "Raven and Bell," just vacated by his partner,

and put the "Defiance" coach on the road to London, by Worcester. Lawrence, in his turn, perhaps somewhat alarmed by the storm he had raised, issued an advertisement, thanking the public for their patronage, and entreating further support in his attempts to open up a direct road to Holyhead. Without this encouragement, he said, "several years' labour and great expense he has been at (together with the great advantage to the town of Shrewsbury) would be entirely lost."

He was not content with advertising, but travelled largely, and waited upon many people of influence for their interest in obtaining the improvement of the route on which he had set his heart; and prevailed upon several persons who had been upper servants in great English families to establish inns at the several stages. His exertions were not fruitless. Several of the principal travellers began to travel the Shrewsbury route, and not only saved some miles and avoided the Conway ferry, but had the additional advantage of superior accommodation. Lawrence had a powerful ally in the press, and the *Shrewsbury Chronicle* is early found recording successes. Thus, February 3rd, 1781, the Editor "is happy to inform the publick that the travelling through this town daily increases," and from that time proceeded to record the names of important personages who passed through, in preference to Chester. In the same year Lawrence still further enlarged his views, and

inspired the *Chronicle* with the statement: "We have not a doubt, from the rapid increase of business on this road, that, if proper application is made, one, if not both, of the Irish mails will pass through the town." He had, in fact, been making interest with the Post Office to that end. The mails of that day, however, were not coaches, but mounted postboys; the first mail-coach in England not being established until August, 1784.

Lawrence indeed went to surprising lengths, and seems to have constituted himself a species of informal road-authority, to judge from the *Shrewsbury Chronicle* of April 13th, 1782, in whose columns care is taken to "inform the publick that the new road through Wales, *viâ* Llanrwst, has by the activity of Mr. Lawrence been kept open, notwithstanding most other roads were rendered impassable by the heavy falls of snow." In the September of that year, Lawrence had another triumph, for Earl Temple, the new Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, travelled by Shrewsbury, and lay at the "Lion," where he was received in state by the Mayor and Corporation. "His lordship," we learn, "said he was extremely glad the Shrewsbury road had been recommended to him, as he found it not only considerably nearer, but the accommodations were in every respect perfectly to his satisfaction."

In February, 1784, we still find Lawrence "determined to use every effort to establish

effectually what he has so long laboured at a great expence to accomplish," but it was not until 1802 that his exertions procured the commencement of a shorter line of road, branching off at Pentre Voelas from his previous route by Llanrwst and Conway and going to Bangor by the present route, *viâ* Bettws and Capel Curig. He was aided in this by the Lord Penrhyn of that time, with whom it had long been a favourite scheme, and who, to ensure its popularity with travellers, built the great inn beside it at Capel Curig. By the completion of this road a saving of eight miles was effected.

Meanwhile Palmer had established mail-coaches, and Lawrence had secured an "Oxford, Birmingham, and Shrewsbury Mail, on Mr. Palmer's plan," so early as September 5th, 1785. But it went no further until 1808, when it was extended to Holyhead.

New times, however, had now dawned, and the modernised Holyhead Road was coming into existence, under the control of greater forces than Lawrence could have brought to bear. The Government and Telford between them planned the "New Parliamentary Road," which by July 1817 was sufficiently advanced for the mails to be sent this way. The "Oxford, Birmingham and Shrewsbury Mail" was therefore discontinued beyond Birmingham, and the "New Holyhead Mail" began to run from London by the present Holyhead Road, in thirty-eight hours. Shrewsbury had at last achieved its

due, and the "Chester and Holyhead Mail," a slower coach, by Northampton and Stafford, was regarded as altogether an inferior affair.

XXII

When at last Lawrence was gathered to his fathers and new men took up the business of coaching, the daily Mail-coach to Holyhead and the two stages, running twice a week, were increased to seven coaches to or from London daily, in addition to numerous local stages. There were the "Oxonian Express," through to Holyhead, by High Wycombe, Oxford, and Birmingham; the "Union," by the same route, going no further than Shrewsbury; the "Shamrock," to Holyhead, by Coventry and Birmingham; the "New Mail," to Holyhead by the same route; the "Prince of Wales," to Holyhead, by Oxford and Birmingham; and two Post-coaches. One could then actually do the journey between London and Shrewsbury in eighteen hours. There were also Crowley's and Hearne's vans and waggons, three-horsed and six-horsed, for the carriage of goods, plodding very soberly and with much jingling of harness and whip cracking, accomplishing the distance in three or four days.

But to accomplish the journey by coach in

eighteen hours did not satisfy the new spirit come upon the scene. Isaac Taylor, who had taken the "Lion" coach-office and appears to have separated the businesses of inn-keeping and coach-proprietorship—that house being then occupied by William Tompkins, who was succeeded by Mrs. Basnett in 1835, and by Mrs. Brown in 1842—started the celebrated "Wonder" between Shrewsbury and London, in 1825, to "perform," as the old coach advertisements expressed it, the journey of one hundred and fifty-eight miles in sixteen hours. The "Wonder" set the fashion of day coaches running long distances, and was the first to accomplish over a hundred miles a day. The proprietors' complete satisfaction and pride in what they had found it possible to do are seen clearly reflected in the name given to the coach. Taylor had a strong company of allies to work the enterprise. It was horsed out of London from the "Bull and Mouth" by Sherman, and by the most reliable men at Coventry, Birmingham and Wolverhampton; while at Shiffnal and Haygate were two of his own brothers.

According to the time bill here appended, there were sixty-five minutes consumed in stops on the way. Add to these fifteen minutes for the fourteen or fifteen changes at the various stages down the road, and the result is eighty minutes to be deducted from the running time, thus giving a net average speed of a little over eleven and a half miles an hour.

TIME BILL OF THE "WONDER" COACH, LONDON TO SHREWSBURY

Despatched from the "Bull and Mouth" at 6.30 morning.
Left the "Peacock," Islington, at 6.45 morning.

Proprietors.	Places.	Miles.	Time allowed.	Should arrive.	Did arrive.	Time lost.
			H. M.	H. M.		
Sherman .	St. Albans . .	22½	2 3	8 48		
J. Lilley .	Redbourne . .	4½	0 25	9 13		
—	Breakfast. .	—	0 20	—		
Goodyear .	Dunstable . .	8¼	0 48	10 21		
Sheppard .	Daventry . .	29¾	2 54	2 15		
Collier . .	Coventry. . .	19	1 47	4 2		
—	Business . .	—	0 5	—		
Vyse. . .	Birmingham .	19	1 39	5 46		
—	Dinner . .	—	0 35	—		
Evans . .	Wolverhampton	14	1 15	7 36		
—	Business . .	—	0 5	—		
Evans . .	Summer House	6½	0 35	8 16		
J. Taylor .	Shiffnal . . .	6½	0 35	8 51		
H. J. Taylor	Haygate . . .	8	0 43	9 34		
I. Taylor .	Shrewsbury . .	10	0 56	10 30		
		158	14 45			

This was a programme kept with surprising punctuality throughout the year; a punctuality and an evenness of working obtained only by the large number of horses kept and the frequent stages. The Shrewsbury "Wonder" thus came to be regarded with such veneration for its time-keeping qualities that watches and clocks were regulated by its passing. When the swift yellow coach hove in sight at the end of a village street, the inhabitants, finding their time-pieces fast, would not assume the lateness of the "Wonder," but would put back the hands

with a thorough and well-merited belief in the coach.

The stud of horses kept for the "Wonder" numbered one hundred and fifty, all sleek and plump. None of the horses worked more than one hour out of the twenty-four, being required merely on one of the ten-mile stages, which they frequently performed in five minutes under schedule time, and then were taken fresh and vigorous from the traces. They were fed liberally, with the view of keeping them heavy, rather than muscular; strength for short and powerful exertion being required, rather than endurance. Their average value was £20 and they were seldom worked more than four years on this fast coach. Well groomed and cared for, theirs was a lot to be envied.

The surprising performances of the "Wonder," and its financial success, at last raised up a spirit of rivalry in the breasts of others in the horsey and coaching way, so that in 1834 a competitor was put upon the road, named (from the pseudonym adopted by C. J. Apperley, that famous sporting writer), the "Nimrod." Jobson, landlord of the "Talbot" inn, horsed the "Nimrod" out of Shrewsbury. From London it was horsed on alternate days by Horne, from the "Bull," Holborn, or by Robert Nelson from the "Belle Sauvage," as far as Redbourne. The proprietors of the "Wonder," whose enterprise had in its success raised up this competition, were furious, and determined to put another

coach on the road. Accordingly, the "proud Salopians" were astonished by the appearance of an advertisement in the *Shrewsbury Chronicle* during July, 1835, announcing a new coach, designed to supplement the celebrated "Wonder." It ran:—

> Isaac Taylor, ever grateful for the distinguished support he has received from the public, announces a new and elegant fast day coach, called the "Stag," every morning at a quarter before five, arriving at the "Bull and Mouth," opposite the General Post Office, at seven the same evening. I. T. has been induced to commence running the "Stag," to prevent the celebrated "Wonder" being in any way injured by racing or at all interfered with in the regularity which has hitherto been observed.

The figures quoted above give a journey of fourteen hours and a quarter, a speed not approached within half-an-hour by the "Wonder" itself at its very best. But this kind of thing could not, and did not, last, and while it did continue must have been cruelly hard on the horses.

The "Stag" was designed to run a little in advance of the "Nimrod," while the "Wonder" followed it. In the expressive language of the road, the "Nimrod" was "well nursed," and only by the greatest good luck chanced to pick up any passengers on the way. They raced along with such a hearty rivalry all the way that the three coaches often arrived simul-

taneously at Islington, *two hours before time.* It is surprising, both that nothing ever happened to them, and that Shrewsbury could at that time have had sufficient intercourse with London to render this wholesale competition, in view of the other coaches running at the same time, a paying speculation.

The rivals then commenced cutting one another's throats by actually rendering the affair unprofitable, and paring down the fares by one third, trusting that those with the longest purse would be able to survive, and recoup themselves when the others had been driven off the road. Fifteen hundred pounds were lost in twelve months by the proprietors of the "Stag" and "Wonder" in this way; but they had the satisfaction of seeing the "Nimrod" off the road, and though the "Emerald" and "Hibernia" night coaches, extended for a time from Birmingham, loaded well from the rival yard, the famous "yellow belly," as the "Wonder" was fondly called, went on, with fares raised again to 48*s.* inside and 30*s.* out, from the 30*s.* and £1 to which, in competition, they had fallen.

Thus did the "Wonder" maintain its pre-eminence in the little time left before the London and Birmingham Railway came, in 1838, to cut its journey short, and the Shrewsbury and Birmingham Railway, in 1849, to complete the work of sweeping *all* the coaches off the road into the limbo of obsolete institutions. In its last few years the "Wonder" was accelerated

by one hour on both up and down journeys, for, starting an hour later, it reached its destination at the same time as before. Indeed, at the very time when railway enterprise cut it off in mid-career, a further acceleration was contemplated. It was proposed to perform the journey in thirteen hours. To do this it would have been necessary to establish six-mile, instead of ten-mile stages, and to abandon all stopping for taking up intermediate passengers.

But in the last days of its entire journey the "Wonder" was made to do a remarkable thing. It left the "Bull and Mouth" at the moment when the train for Birmingham steamed out of Euston, and reached Birmingham twenty minutes earlier. That extraordinary feat was not repeated, and was only possible even then by reason of the rails being slippery with rain and the locomotive wheels losing grip, causing great delay. From 1839 the "Wonder" ran only between Shrewsbury and Birmingham, by way of Ironbridge and Madeley, and ended its career, as a two-horse coach, in 1842.

XXIII

If Shrewsbury was a place to and from which came and went many fast coaches, it

certainly sent forth one coach that was phenomenally slow. The "Shrewsbury and Chester Highflyer," at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was very much less of a flyer than might have been expected from its name.

Those two places are forty miles apart. The "Highflyer" set out from Shrewsbury at eight o'clock in the morning, and arrived at Chester, under favourable circumstances, at the same hour in the evening. This snail-like crawl of little over three miles an hour is so remarkable that it invites investigation, whereupon some extraordinary things are revealed. At Wrexham, for example, two hours were allowed for dinner, and if his passengers wanted to linger over another bottle, Billy Williams, the coachman, who had looked in at the coffee-room door to announce the starting, would affably say, "Don't let me disturb you, gentlemen."

"Billy Williams," as he was to one class, "Mr. William Williams" to another, "Chester Billy" and "Shrewsbury Billy" to the rest, was—need it be said?—a Welshman, and if any one wished for a little extra time in which to see Wrexham Church and its tower—one of the "wonders of Wales"—his patriotic ardour could not withstand the application for a further halt. Then, when Ellesmere was reached, another long stop was made to sample the *cwrw da*, the famous ale of that place; and, in fact, stops anywhere and everywhere, so that the wonder was, not that the journey

occupied twelve hours, but that it did not take twenty-four. It must, indeed, have required some sharp driving, between whiles, to perform the distance in a dozen hours, and it was probably during one of these spurts that another coachman—one Jem Robins—was killed by being crushed under the coach when on one occasion it was overturned at an abrupt corner.

Billy Williams, however, made a peaceful end. He retired, or *was* retired by the railway's usurpation of his line of country. He was what our grandfathers called an "original," and a *protégé* of the Honourable Thomas Kenyon, at Pradoe, to whom he gave an excellent reason why horses should seem to go better at night.

"Hang me, Billy!" the honourable had exclaimed, "I've tried to account for it, but never could."

"Why, I'm surprised at you," said Billy; "do you mean you don't know that?" "Why, of course I don't," replied the squire. "Well, then," said Billy, "if you want to know the *real* reason, it's because you've had your dinner."

Billy was the hero of a story that long made a laughing-stock of him. The Honourable Thomas Kenyon was driving on one occasion to Chester races, but before setting out with his party from Pradoe thought that, as it was a particularly hot day, Billy might feel more comfortable if he exchanged his breeches and leather tops for lighter raiment. He accordingly told him to go upstairs and put on a pair of his own white

trousers. Billy went up, and came back attired in a manner his host had never contemplated, for he had put the trousers on over the other garments!

Those days of fast coaches and slow coaches seem very remote from these railway times, when by a quick train you may reach Shrewsbury from London in three hours and thirty-five minutes, arriving, without turning a hair, at the castellated building that serves for a railway station, say, by the 2.10 p.m. train from Paddington, bringing you to the capital of the "proud Salopians" at 5.45, not too late for tea. Thus, between lunch and the afternoon cup you have accomplished what the "Wonder" at its best took fourteen hours and three-quarters to do. This forty-eight-miles-an-hour gait is, of course, not remarkable as railway travelling goes, but it would have sufficiently startled the old Shropshire squires, who thought they knew something of pace, aye, and went it themselves, in every sense.

Those were fine fellows, and their grand and beautiful old town of the Three Loggerheads still keeps an air—historic, racy, and individual—even in these levelling days. The memory of the hard-drinking, hard-swearing, and anything and everything but hard-working, Shropshire squires of the first quarter of the nineteenth century, who drank deep and left no heeltaps, "to friends all round the Wrekin," will not readily fade. The heritages of their descendants—gout and encumbered estates—forbid the generous capacity

of their forbears for old port and gambling to be forgot, and such things, however excellent they may be as vouchers for the fact that they lived their lives of old, are little desired by a generation that also desires to live and go the pace after its own ideals.

There remain in Shrewsbury many signs of this fine old free-handed way of living, when the town was not only the capital of the Marches of Wales, but resorted to for its "season" by the county families, who had their own town houses here, and came to them from their rural seats just as do their descendants to the London season. For another thing, the picturesque old town—seated so grandly within the girdle of the yellow Severn that enfolds it lovingly—is full of the queerest, quaintest inns that can be imagined; their strangely roomy and cavernous construction equalled only by their uniquely incongruous signs.

Much has already been said of the "Lion" inn, in connection with coaching, and let it now be more particularly treated, first of all with the remark that it was the foremost inn of its day. It was also the scene of some of Mytton's mad exploits: that Jack Mytton, of Halston, who was a true pattern and faithful exemplar of the old-time Shropshire squire. They still show the window through which he leaped, for pure devilment, when he was being chaired, shoulder-high, by the enthusiastic burgesses on his return for Parliament in 1819.

He sprang from the chair on that occasion, and alighted, amid a shower of broken glass, in the bar. No one was particularly surprised, for his was a freakish nature; but they *would* have been astonished if he had walked in, in the usual way, by the door.

It was here, too, that the adventure of the foxes, narrated by "Nimrod," occurred. Mytton, "on going into the bar of the 'Lion Inn' one evening when somewhat 'sprung' by wine, was told there was a box in the coach-office for him, which contained two brace of foxes. He requested it might be brought to him, when, taking up the poker, he knocked the lid off it, and let the foxes out in the room in which the landlady and some of her female friends were assembled—giving a thrilling view-halloa at the time. Now it cannot be said they 'broke cover' in good style; but it may safely be asserted that they broke such a great quantity of bottles, glasses, and crockery-ware as to have rendered the joke an expensive one."

It will not be matter for surprise, after this, when it is said that Jack Mytton was absolutely the most fearless and dare-devil among the courageous, reckless spirits of his time. He was always ready to risk breaking his own neck, and that of any one else who might have the misfortune to be thrown into his company while driving; and the story told of him and his nervous friend in a gig together is perfectly true. The friend gently remonstrated with him

on his wild driving. "We may be upset," said he. "Were you ever much hurt, then, by being upset in a gig?" inquired Mytton. "No, thank God!" exclaimed the friend, "for I was never upset in one." "What!" replied the squire, "never upset in a gig? What a d—d slow fellow you must be," and, running his near wheel up the bank, over they both went.

XXIV

The "Lion" was the hotel to which De Quincey came in 1802, when, as a youth, he was setting forth in his unpractical way for London. He had walked in from Oswestry, reaching Shrewsbury two hours after nightfall. Innkeepers in those times knew little of pedestrians who footed it for pleasure, and classed all who walked when they might have rode as tramps. Therefore, it will be allowed that De Quincey timed his arrival well, at an hour when dusty feet are not so easily seen. However, had his shoes been noticed, he was ready with a defence, for he came to the "Lion" as a passenger already booked to London by the Mail. An Oswestry friend had performed that service for him, and here he was come to wait the arrival of that conveyance.

"This character," he says, "at once installed

me as rightfully a guest of the inn, however profligate a life I might have previously led as a pedestrian. Accordingly I was received with special courtesy, and it so happened with something even like pomp. Four wax-lights carried before me by obedient mutes, these were but ordinary honours, meant (as old experience had instructed me) for the first engineering step towards effecting a lodgment upon the stranger's purse. In fact, the wax-lights are used by innkeepers, both abroad and at home, to 'try the range of their guns.' If the stranger submits quietly, as a good anti-pedestrian ought surely to do, and fires no counter-gun by way of protest, then he is recognised at once as passively within range, and amenable to orders. I have always looked upon this fine of 5*s.* or 7*s.* (for wax that you do not absolutely need) as a sort of inaugural *honorarium* entrance-money, what in jails used to be known as *smart* money, proclaiming me to be a man *comme il faut*, and no toll in this world of tolls do I pay so cheerfully. This, meantime, as I have said, was too customary a form to confer much distinction. The wax-lights, to use the magnificent Grecian phrase επομπ ενε, moved pompously before me, as the holy-holy fire (the inextinguishable fire and its golden hearth) moved before Cæsar *semper* Augustus, when he made his official or ceremonial *avatars*. Yet still this moved along the ancient channels of glorification: it rolled along ancient grooves —I might say, indeed, like one of the twelve

Cæsars when dying, *Ut puto, Deus fio* (It's my private opinion that at this very moment I am turning into a god), but still the metamorphosis was not complete. *That* was accomplished when I stepped into the sumptuous room allotted to me. It was a ball-room of noble proportions—lighted, if I chose to issue orders, by three gorgeous chandeliers, not basely wrapped up in paper, but sparkling through all their thickets of crystal branches, and flashing back the soft rays of my tall waxen lights. There were, moreover, two orchestras, which money would have filled within thirty minutes. And, upon the whole, one thing only was wanting—viz., a throne, for the completion of my *apotheosis*.

"It might be seven p.m. when first I entered upon my kingdom. About three hours later I rose from my chair, and with considerable interest looked out into the night. For nearly two hours I had heard fierce winds arising; and the whole atmosphere had by this time become one vast laboratory of hostile movements in all directions. Such a chaos, such a distracting wilderness of dim sights, and of those awful "Sounds that live in darkness" (Wordsworth's *Excursion*), never had I consciously witnessed. . . . . Long before midnight the household (with the exception of a solitary waiter) had retired to rest. Two hours, at least, were left to me, after twelve o'clock had struck, for heart-shaking reflections, and the local circumstances around me deepened and intensified

these reflections, impressed upon them solemnity and terror, sometimes even horror. . . . .

"The unusual dimensions of the rooms, especially their towering height, brought up continually and obstinately, through natural links of associated feelings or images, the mighty vision of London waiting me, afar off. An altitude of nineteen or twenty feet showed itself unavoidably upon an exaggerated scale in some of the smaller side-rooms —meant probably for cards or for refreshments. This single feature of the rooms—their unusual altitude, and the echoing hollowness which had become the exponent of that altitude—this one terrific feature (for terrific it was in its effect), together with the crowding and evanescent images of the flying feet that so often had spread gladness through these halls on the wings of youth and hope at seasons when every room rang with music—all this, rising in tumultuous vision, whilst the dead hours of the night were stealing along, all around me —household and town—sleeping, and whilst against the windows more and more the storm was raving, and to all appearance endlessly growing, threw me into the deadliest condition of nervous emotion under contradictory forces, high over which predominated horror recoiling from that unfathomed abyss in London into which I was now so wilfully precipitating myself.

". . . Such thoughts, and visions without number corresponding to them, were moving across the *camera obscura* of my fermenting

fancy, when suddenly I heard a sound of wheels, which, however, soon died off into some remote quarter. I guessed at the truth, viz., that it was the Holyhead Mail,* wheeling off on its primary duty of delivering its bags at the post-office. In a few minutes it was announced as having changed horses; and I was off to London."

XXV

"ALL the mails in the kingdom," he continues, "with one solitary exception (that of Liverpool), were so arranged as to reach London early in the morning. Between the hours of four and six a.m., one after the other, according to their station upon the roll, all the mails from the N[orth]—the E[ast]—the W[est]—the S[outh]—whence, according to some curious etymologists, comes the magical word NEWS—drove up successively to the post-office and rendered up their heart-shaking budgets; none earlier than four o'clock, none later than six. I am speaking of days when all things moved slowly. The condition of the roads was then

* *Not* the Holyhead Mail. De Quincey is writing of 1802, when the Holyhead Mail, as already shown, went through Chester. He refers to the London, Birmingham, and Shrewsbury Mail, which, started in 1785, lasted until 1808. It was by this he travelled.

such, that, in order to face it, a corresponding build of coaches, hyperbolically massive, was rendered necessary; the mails were, upon principle, made so strong as to be the heaviest of all carriages known to the wit or the experience of man; and from these joint evils of ponderous coaches and roads that were quagmires, it was impossible for even the picked breed of English coach-horses, all bone and blood, to carry forward their huge tonnage at a greater rate than six and a half miles an hour. Consequently, it cost eight-and-twenty massy* hours for us, leaving Shrewsbury at two o'clock in the dead of night, to reach the General Post-office, and faithfully to deposit upon the threshing-floors of Lombard Street all that weight of love and hatred which Ireland had found herself able to muster through twenty-four hours in the great depôt of Dublin, by way of donation to England."

No apology, it will be conceded, is necessary for having quoted De Quincey at this length, especially as these passages are omitted from many editions, and so are little known. The eloquence that thus gives expression to the morbid imagination of this forerunner of modern neurotics is well employed here, and so largely has mind usurped dominion over matter in later years that few of the present generation will altogether fail to sympathise with his nocturnal terrors.

* The "solid" hours, or the "mortal" hours, of modern colloquial speech.

The circumstance that led to his being shown into the ball-room of the "Lion," was that of the house being under repair. That room is still in existence, and a noble and impressive room it is, occupying the upper floor of a two-storeyed building, added to the back of the older house perhaps a hundred and fifty years ago. Lofty, as he describes it, and lighted by tall windows, the features of the two music-galleries and the chandeliers are still there, together with the supper-room at one end, divided off from the greater saloon, and so disproportionately lofty. The ball-room is additionally lighted from the ceiling by a domed skylight. The moulded plaster decorations on walls and ceiling, in the Adams style—that style which so beautifully recast classic conventions—are exquisite, and even yet keep their delicate colouring, as do the emblematic figures of Music and Dancing painted on the door-panels. At rare intervals the room is used for its original purpose, but it more commonly serves, throughout the year, that of a commercial travellers' stock-room.

The way to this derelict haunt of eighteenth-century gaiety lies down the yard of the inn, and up a fine broad stone stairway, now much chipped, dirty and neglected. On the ground floor is the billiard-room of the present day, formerly the coach dining-room. In crepuscular apartments adjoining, in these times given over to forgotten lumber, the curious may find the

deserted kitchens of a bygone age, with the lifts and hatches to upper floors that once conveyed their abundant meals to a vanished generation of John Bulls.

This portion of the house is seen to advantage at the end of the cobble-stoned yard, passing the old coach office remaining there, unchanged,

THE "LION" YARD.

and proceeding to the other end, where the yard passes out into a steep and narrow lane called Stony Bank. Looking back, the great red brick bulk of the ball room, with the stone effigy of a lion on the parapet is seen; the surrounding buildings giving a very powerful impression of the extensive business done here in days of old.

The "Lion" suffered severely when the railway was opened to Shrewsbury, and the more so because its position, from being the most favourable, was suddenly changed into the most unfavourable; the railway-station lying at the other end of the town, and travellers no longer passing as a matter of necessity by Wyle Cop.

For many years the "Lion" has therefore been all too large for present needs, and its upper floors unfurnished and given over to rats, mice and spiders. But it has had better fortune than befell the "Talbot."

The "Talbot," in Market street, was the great rival of the "Lion." It was the house to which came John Jobson to set up the "Nimrod," and be generally a thorn in the side of Isaac Taylor, of the "Lion" yard. Although much else is lost, fugitive memories still remain of Mrs. Jobson's turban, hinting that she must have been a remarkable person. Why has not some diarist of that time left us an intimate account of all these things?

After the coaching age and Jobson were both simultaneously snuffed out, in 1842, the "Talbot" was taken by E. Wheeler and Son, followed shortly by one Peters, who had been a coachman on the "Nimrod." It is to be feared he found it anything but a lucrative speculation, for the house was shortly closed. Some little while later, it was taken by the Post Office. The building still exists, little altered, although the

lower part is a fancy warehouse, and the upper floors let out as offices, by the name of "Talbot Chambers." It is a great square unbeautiful red-brick structure, with the sign, an effigy of that old English hound, the Talbot, still surmounting the entrance.

The "Raven and Bell," frequently mentioned in the rivalries of the old coach-proprietors, is not to be confounded with the "Raven" in Castle Street, but was situated on Wyle Cop. The "Raven,"—a favourite sign in Shropshire and Staffordshire—and almost exclusively confined to these two counties, derives from the old heraldic coat of the Corbets, that ancient Shropshire family whose ancestral acres are situated at Moreton Corbet, and is an ancient play upon the family name, by way of *corbeau*, the French for raven. Indeed, not only the Corbets of Moreton, but most others of the same name, bear one or more ravens as their heraldic cognizance.

Wyle Cop is still a place of inns. There are the beautiful old "Unicorn," half-timbered and gabled, and that oddly conjoined "Lion and Pheasant"; and many another to be found throughout the town.

XXVI

But if the inns be quaint, how shall justice be done to the quaintness of the mediæval timbered

houses in the High Street, or Butcher Row? There is no town in England—no, not even Chester — that can show a greater number, or more beautiful examples of black and white; while for queer street names Shrewsbury certainly bears away the bell. There are Wyle Cop, and the houses at its foot, once known as "under the Wyle"; Pride Hill, which does not refer to the almost Spanish pride of Salopians, but to an old mansion of the Pride family that once stood there; Shoplatch; Murivance, on the old town walls; Mardol, or "Dairy Fold"; and Dog-pole, originally "Duck-pool." In midst of all these is the Market-square, with the old red sandstone Market-house in the centre; a place notable in these days rather for a pleasant and aristocratic quiet than for anything connected with marketing. The old trading interest went in 1869, when the new Market buildings and Corn Exchange — a not altogether successful combination of red and yellow brick — were opened. A curious inscription on the front of the old building dates it back to Queen Elizabeth's time, and above, in a recess stands, the effigy of that Richard, Duke of York, whose head graced one of York's gates in 1460, after the Battle of Wakefield. The effigy was brought from the old gatehouse on the Welsh Bridge, demolished in 1791. Armoured from heel to crown, it reminds one vividly of those feudal Daimios of Japan whom it was imperative to sweep away before that country could emerge

from barbarism and savagery. And let it not be forgotten that our "chivalry" of old was as savage and as barbarous as anything to be found in China or any other Asiatic country.

A warrior of unflinching resolve and proud belief in self was Clive, one of Shropshire's greatest sons, whose bronze statue, its pedestal simply inscribed with his name, stands in advance of the Market-house. It was well merely to place his name there, for what do Shropshiremen need to be told of Clive? That would be an ill day when they should forget his youth, his manhood, his achievements, and his tragedy. To serve your country—to give her Empire, trade, and wealth—these things do not fall to the lot of many men, and it is well they should not, for they bring the curses and the rabid enmity of the factious, the deprecation of the feeble-hearted, and the vitriolic hatred of the envious and the mean-souled; ever the loudest voiced among the body politic. Few are those who, unmoved, could be the recipients of such base slander and ingratitude, and Clive was not one of them. The man who gave us India died by his own hand, but none the less done to death by the Little Englanders of that day.

The dedications of Shrewsbury's churches are as unusual as the names of its streets. There are St. Chad's, St. Alkmund's, and St. Julian's, among others; but the finest church of all is St. Mary's, whose spire, soaring to a height of 220 feet, is oddly at variance with the

tower and the rest of the building, being of white stone, while the body of the church is in red. St. Mary's spire is visible from great distances. It tempted a steeple-jack named Cadman to a fearful death in 1739. He had been repairing the spire, and, having completed the work, was foolish enough to essay the feat of sliding down a rope fastened to the spire at one end, and at the other to an oak tree across the Severn. The rope broke, and he was flung from mid-air into the street of St. Mary Fryars, being instantly killed. A curious epitaph to him remains:—

> Let this small monument record the name
> Of Cadman and to future time proclaim
> How by a bold attempt to fly from this high spire,
> Across the Sabrine stream he did acquire
> His fatal end. 'Twas not from want of skill
> Or courage to perform the task he fell.
> No, no; a faulty rope being drawn too tight,
> Hurried his soul on high to take its flight
> And bade the body here a last good-night.

St. Mary's is largely Norman, and very, very beautiful. St. Chad's, on the other hand, built a hundred years ago, is Greek of sorts and designed in a perfect circle; the model of a heathen temple, and the worst of bad taste. But there is this satisfaction; it is not in an obtrusive position, and unless it be diligently sought is not likely to be found.

The Castle, on the other hand, is the first thing seen by the railway traveller from London,

just as it was the least likely in coaching days. When the Psalmist sings of the valleys being exalted and the mountains laid low, he parallels the changes wrought at Shrewsbury by the railway, for the traffic that came in by Wyle Cop has been wholly transferred to another line of route, where the Castle is the most prominent

THE MARKET-PLACE, SHREWSBURY.

object. If there were ever one who, alighting at Shrewsbury station and, entering the station-yard, failed to see the Castle, he surely would be blind to the light of day, for the frowning battlements that even now glower down from their craggy foothold, after eight hundred years, overhang very dramatically the cabs and

carriages, the portmanteaus and Gladstone bags of modern life. The keep is all that is left of the original Norman stronghold. The outworks have disappeared these hundreds of years past, and the walls of the keep itself have been patched and re-faced. Impressive still is that ancient fortress in sunshine, but infinitely grand when the sun is setting, the lights of the station begin to twinkle, and the signal-lamps to gleam green and red. Then those ponderous turrets and ruddy walls take on a silhouetted blackness that effectually hides the innovations and the modern touches only too visible in the broad eye of day.

Shrewsbury School is as prominent as the Castle itself, on the way up into the town; a school no longer since modern buildings have been raised on the other side of the Severn. Now used as a Public Library and Museum, and with a seated bronze statue of Darwin, its last famous scholar, in front, it fitly enshrines within its noble Tudor walls many records of Shrewsbury's and Shropshire's past.

One thing, certainly, the visitor to Shrewsbury cannot, nay, must not, fail of doing. He must not neglect the delicacy peculiar to the town—

A Shrewsbury cake of Pailin's best make,

as Ingoldsby has it in his "Bloudie Jacke of Shrewsberrie." Only Pailin no longer makes Shrewsbury cakes. He has long been gathered

to his fathers, and let us hope he is quiring with the celestial throng. But, if Pailin be dead, the making of the especial cakes goes on unfailingly, and the eating of them is a rite—a canonical observance almost.

Over against the shop where the original Pailin earned his undying fame—why has Shrewsbury no statue to him?—is the court-yard that gives access to that wonderfully beautiful timbered building, the Council House, the spot where, in bygone days, the Council of the Marches governed the Principality of Wales and these marchlands. "Lords' Place" they sometimes name this vice-regal court.

A great feature of Shrewsbury is the Quarry. Now the Quarry is not a quarry at all, but a public park beside the Severn, in whose beautiful grounds is probably the largest and most beautiful avenue of limes in the kingdom; and amidst those noble trees there stands a stone effigy of Hercules, covered over with the green stains of weather until he looks quite the most horrid Hercules the explorer is likely to discover anywhere. Also, his muscles are things of a weird and wonderful fascination, more resembling subcutaneous apple dumplings than mere representations of gristle and sinew. Who is there that lives within a circle of fifty miles from Shrewsbury and has not heard of the Quarry and its flower shows? Do not the railway companies run excursions especially for those who flock there? What Shrewsbury

THE COUNCIL HOUSE.

would do without its Quarry it is difficult to imagine, and scarce anything more disastrous could be thought of than that it should ever be improved away; for the town is so placed upon its almost island site that the houses huddle closely up to one another in most directions, and this is one of the very few clear spaces within the circlet that the Severn makes.

XXVII

Indeed, when you have descended Mardol, and so across the Welsh Bridge—the "reddie way to Wales"—have left the town on the way to Holyhead, you are not yet clear of streets and houses. There, on the further shore of Severn, outside Shrewsbury altogether, is the long, steep street of Frankwell, all old houses and tottering tenements, dirty and crazy, and so picturesque that surely some top-hatted, frock-coated smeller of drains will presently level it with the ground and build some sanitary and abominably ugly successor. The pity of these reforms that must needs be so destructive! Not many places are more charming to the artistic eye than Frankwell. There, among many other old houses is the timbered "String of Horses" inn, that perhaps got its name when the road was a steeper ascent even than now, and eight and

ten horses in line toiled up the rugged way to Wales.

In those old days, going back many centuries ago, the "Frankwell" of to-day was the *Franche ville*, or "Free-town," where the outlanders might squat; the "beggarly and turbulent" Welsh, for example, who might by no means come and live or ply their trades within the walls, and must go forth from the town every night. Partly as a defence against more threatening dangers, and partly to keep the Frankwell aliens, and other unauthorised and undesirable rabble, outside for the night hours, when the powers of evil are exalted, the gate-house was long maintained across the Welsh Bridge and the gates duly shut at sundown.

Darwin, who by his doctrine of evolution and heterodox reading of accepted phenomena caused many flutterings of episcopal skirts, uprooted much placid belief, and gave many a simple soul anxious times, was born in that great house, the Mount, on Frankwell hill-top, so long ago as 1809. The house stands in its own grounds, surrounded by high walls, just the same now as then; only the toll-gate, spoken of in Telford's reports as "Dr. Darwin's"—although Dr. Darwin had nothing to do with it and probably wished it at the devil, with the shouts of "Gate!" all night long—is gone. Here the old houses begin to thin out, and beyond, to Shelton, one mile and three-quarters from the town, suburban villas line the way.

At Shelton Gate, where the road branches to Welshpool, still stands that battered and riven monarch, Shelton Oak, just within the garden-wall of one of these modern villas, but readily to be inspected. "Glyndwr's Oak" it is often named, from the persistent legend that Owain Glyndwr from its branches watched his ally, Harry Hotspur, being defeated at the Battle of Shrewsbury, on that fatal day, July 21st, 1403.

SHELTON OAK.

But, unfortunately for the credibility of that legend, the battle was fought three miles away, at a spot not visible from here, and Glyndwr was very far distant on that particular day. This has been proved again and again, and it saves something of Glyndwr's reputation to accord him a decent *alibi*; but the myth is immortal. It has brought no good to the old oak, for, what with the relic-hunters who have hacked pieces away, and their fellow-sinners

who have carved their own names on its giant trunk, it is in sorry case. Age, of course, is responsible for its hollow body and dead limbs, but the kindly ivy wraps it fondly round and hides many a scar. The trunk has a girth of 45 feet, a measurement that goes far to prove an age going a hundred years or more back beyond Shrewsbury Fight, and that *if* Glyndwr had been here he could have, indeed, climbed its branches. Had he desired to see the battle, he should have taken his courage in his hands and gone down the road to Shrewsbury, beyond, to get a good view. But there were those at Shrewsbury who could have desired nothing better, and Glyndwr, *if* again he had been here, would perhaps have remembered too keenly what they did down there to the rebel Prince Dafydd when they caught him, more than a hundred years before. What they did was to draw him on a hurdle, hang and quarter him, and divide the pieces among the clamorous towns. Greedy London got his head, and, crowning it with a tinsel crown, spiked it upon Temple Bar, or London Bridge, or some similarly prominent place.

Passing the outlying houses of Bicton village, the road comes to Montford Bridge, where we take our last look at the Severn from Telford's sturdy red sandstone bridge.

The Severn is no sooner left behind than the Breidden Hills, first glimpsed ten miles away and then lost, come again into view. They rise

suddenly from the level with even more dramatic effect than the Wrekin; not of a greater height, rising only to 1200 feet, but of true mountainous character. The distance of seven miles separating them from the road, while not obscuring them, has the grand effect of blotting out all petty detail and giving the appearance of a huge, blue-black, and apparently unscalable mass. To give the last touch of theatrical effect, a monument tops the highest point; perhaps, the traveller thinks, the memorial of some hardy mountaineer who essayed to climb these heights and perished in his rashness. But it is nothing of the sort; only a pillar erected to keep green the memory of Rodney's naval victories. "Colofn Rodney," as the Welsh call it, otherwise "Rodney's Pillar, is inscribed in Welsh to the effect that

> The highest pillars will fall,
> The strongest towers decay;
> But the fame of
> Sir George Brydges Rodney
> shall increase continually
> and his good name shall never be
> obliterated.

From behind "the Breidden," as Salopians call the Hills, came the Welsh in olden times to plunder and commit outrages on these exposed frontiers; and the whole district remained a veritable Alsatia until the beginning of the seventeenth century; outlaws and freebooters, both in Shropshire and Montgomeryshire, the

real authorities, who usually slew, but in their lighter moments and more kindly vein contented themselves with making sheriffs' officers eat the writs they carried, seal and all; or just stripped the traveller and with an oath and the prick of a sword bade him begone.

The red rock that rises, tall, rugged, and precipitous behind Nesscliff village, and gives that place its name, was the fastness of one

THE BREIDDEN HILLS.

of the last of these gentry, Wild Humphry Kynaston, who, when forced from his seat at Middle Castle and outlawed, lived in a cave here and began a career as wildly romantic as that of Robin Hood.

The Ness gave a name not only to Nesscliff, but to the neighbouring villages of Great and Little Ness, in lonely and sequestered spots at a little distance from the road. Nesscliff itself has put off the outward trappings of romance,

and has but a few unremarkable cottages, the very ugly old red-brick "Nesscliff Hotel" of coaching days, and the older and dazzlingly whitewashed "Old Three Pigeons." Telford's fine road, too, disclaims any memories of lawless times, and except where the branch road goes off to Knockin, is in itself as safe and commonplace as any in England. At that point, however, just at the fork, a deep and foul horse-pond offers a likely snare for the outward-bound stranger on dark winter nights; although its sides are guarded by breast-walls as old as Telford's day, to the traveller making towards Shrewsbury. Gallows-tree Bank, one of the rises on the way, now a name only, and not well known at that, had its significance in the old days, together with another of the same name a mile short of Oswestry; better known because it gives its grim title to "Gallows-tree Gate," an old toll-house built beside that Golgotha. The especial need for these engines of retributive justice, placed here in old times, is seen in the peculiar political and social condition of the Marches. Nineteen miles separate the towns of Shrewsbury and Oswestry, and only the smallest of villages are found between. There had once been an attempt to establish a town—with markets and fairs and municipal life—midway, but it failed, and the site of that enterprise may be sought at the quite insignificant village of Ruyton, to which a finger-post, pointing along a bye-road,

directs. "Ruyton-of-the-Eleven-Towns" is the name of that place, and one that whets curiosity. "Towns," however, is a misleading term in this connection, and never meant more than the eleven "townships," or petty subdivisions of land, into which the manor of Ruyton was subdivided. The Earls of Arundel were anciently lords of this manor, as also of that of Oswestry. One of them granted in 1308 a full market charter to Ruyton, with right of scot and lot, and of assize of criminals, and many other privileges, and it is possible that the place would have thrived, only for the fact that another Earl of Arundel, ninety-nine years later, rendered these privileges useless by an arbitrary ordinance that none of the tenants of his various manors were to offer anything for sale at any fair or market until they had first offered it at Oswestry. The penalty for disobeying was a fine of six shillings and eightpence. There is an eloquent piece of fifteenth-century protection! The result, of course, was that Oswestry had the "pick of the market," and Ruyton decayed.

With that decay the road grew more lonely and dangerous. It had always been a wild country, with robbers roaming the open heaths that spread, forbidding and desolate, where enclosed fields now border the road; and as Shrewsbury and Oswestry grew and trade waxed between them, the plunder to be gained grew more and more tempting. Oswestry was

then, and for long after, the chief seat of the Welsh flannel market, and every Monday the Shrewsbury drapers were accustomed to ride to it and back on business. So dangerous was the journey that, even so late as Queen Elizabeth's time, the drapers, not without due cause, had prayers for their safety read in St. Alkmund's church before they set out, and were "ordered"—no need for being bidden, one would think—always to go together, and to bear arms. Perhaps it was because their prayers, their companionship, and their arms did not suffice to protect them, that, a few years later, we find them insisting that the Welsh cloth-weavers and flannel-makers should bring their goods to Shrewsbury to be sold.

XXVIII

Along the road, half a mile or so short of West Felton, on the right hand, stands the lodge guarding the entrance to Pradoe, the home for half a century of that famous whip and amateur of coaching, the Honourable Thomas Kenyon. Whether Pradoe be a corruption of the old Welsh word "Braddws," meaning "Paradise," none can now say with certainty, but sure it is that the beautiful park in whose recesses the house is secluded, half a mile from the road, has one

of the loveliest outlooks upon the distant Welsh mountains of any domain in this fair county of Shropshire. From the tall windows of the noble drawing-room at Pradoe the landscape slopes down towards where the road runs, hid from view; and in the blue distance, glimpsed between the romantic stems of fir trees, rise the steep sides of the Breiddens, their highest point crowned with the Rodney Pillar. The fame of the Honourable Thomas Kenyon—"His Honour," as he was known in his day—will not readily be forgot between Shrewsbury and Oswestry, whose nineteen miles he drove times innumerable in his coach and four. His was a prominent figure, any time between 1803 and 1851, among those "country gentlemen of England," of whom Sir Robert Peel once declared he would rather be the political leader than enjoy the confidence of princes. Whether as a sportsman or a magistrate, "His Honour" was held in the greatest esteem. He was the third son of Lord Chief Justice Kenyon, and was born in 1780 at Gredington, a few miles north of Ellesmere. "Nimrod" has a characteristic passage showing how early Thomas Kenyon's love of horses developed. "Nimrod" was fifteen years of age at the time, and a guest with his father at Gredington:—

"Where are Lloyd and George?" asked Lord Kenyon, wishing that my father might see them.

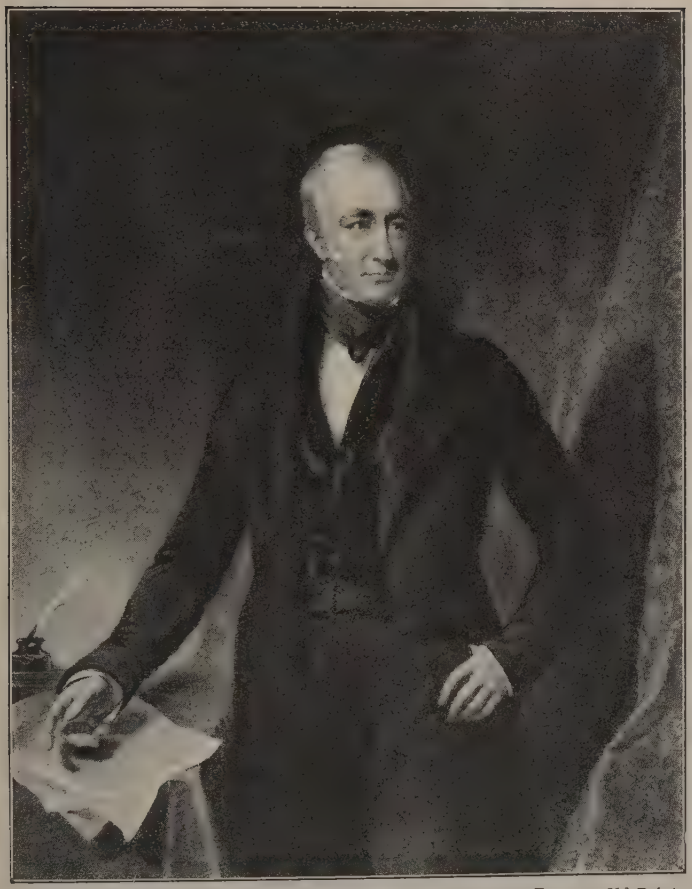
"They are in the garden," was the answer.

"And where is Tom?"

"Master Thomas *is in the stable*, my Lord," was the reply given by the footman.

He was, in fact, taking an active part in caring for the horses, just as, in later years, he "delighted in seeing twelve or fourteen horses bedded down, all for his own driving on the Shrewsbury road."

"The most popular man in the county," as he was presently to be known, married in 1803, and settled at Pradoe. He became active in the volunteer movement consequent upon the threatened invasion of England by Napoleon, and was Chairman of Shropshire Sessions and High Steward of Oswestry. That he never chose to compete for Parliamentary honours was due to his love of a country life in general and of the road in particular. He set up his own four-in-hand and drove it himself, on an average, three times a week, the thirteen miles from Pradoe to Shrewsbury; at other times the five miles to Oswestry, or, on occasional longer trips, to Llangollen or Bangor. Long before Telford had taken in hand the first portion of his work on the Holyhead Road, "His Honour" and his neighbour, Sir Henry Peyton, had done something to improve the part that ran close by. It was in those days heavy with sand, and "as bad a road as ever coach travelled on." Grips and watercourses ran athwart, and rendered it specially dangerous at night. He had these defects covered over, and the sandy parts laid with hard material.



THE HONOURABLE THOMAS KENYON. *From an Old Print.*

A rigid punctuality was the chief feature of "His Honour's" drives. He is described as having been a stylish whip, though by no means a fast driver, and never tempted to any racing rivalry. He was a species of Providence to the country-folk who had business calling them into Shrewsbury, and would always give a lift to any decent wayfarer. Only one condition he insisted upon: that no walking-sticks were allowed. Any one desiring a ride must choose between throwing his stick away and walking. Ducks and geese and market-baskets were permissible, and many an old market-woman rode to or from Shrewsbury on his coach; but sticks never had a place there. The reason of this objection to them does not appear. His punctuality was as invariable as that of the "Wonder" itself; and we have already heard how the country-folk took out their watches as that smart turn-out passed—not to see by how much the coach was overdue, but to set their watches by it. The country people whom he had brought into Shrewsbury learned, by many doleful experiences, to value punctuality as greatly as he; for if, when ready to return, they came to the "Lion" yard a minute too late, they would find the inexorable squire and his coach gone, and have to resign themselves to walking home.

This lover of the road and all its ways lived to see the old order pass away and railways supplant the crack teams that passed his gates.

Endeared to all the coachmen and guards on the Holyhead, and the Chester, and Liverpool roads, he was the recipient in 1842 of what was called "a Token of gratitude presented by the Coachmen and Guards of the 'Lion' Establishment, Shrewsbury." This took the form of a silver salver purchased with a subscription of a hundred and twenty guineas. The presentation was made in the course of a dinner at the "Lion" by Isaac Taylor, himself, as the guest of the evening truly said, "one of the most spirited and respected coach-proprietors in the kingdom." It was an occasion marked by much compliment, and much enthusiasm for the road, but the glory had already waned. Four years before, the London and Birmingham Railway had cleared the greater part of the Holyhead Road of its coaches, and the "Wonder" itself, from the smartest four-horse coach in England had become a two-horse conveyance; but still a wonder, the wonder being that it could, in the face of the railway advance, have kept the road at all.

Nine years later, in 1851, the Honourable Thomas Kenyon died, and was laid to rest in the church of West Felton.

XXIX

Beyond that straggling village, at a point where a branch of the Ellesmere canal runs

athwart the road and is lost in a long perspective to the right, is the hamlet called "Queen's Head," taking its name from the old coaching-inn of that name still presenting a stolid red face to the highway. The inn, the road, the canal, and a deserted toll-house all tell a tale of the havoc wrought by the railway.

QUEEN'S HEAD.

It was a busy place once, for many coaches changed at the inn, and on the old grass-grown wharves of the canal many a ton of goods was unloaded from the barges that in times gone by passed in great numbers, laden with coals, bricks, and manure. It is also the point whence a branch road, going through Whittington, and rejoining the main Holyhead Road at Gobowen,

saves a mile by avoiding Oswestry altogether.

Along that road lies the road to Halston, where, in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, lived the Mad Squire, Jack Mytton, of whose exploits we have already heard something at Shrewsbury. He came of the ancient family of Mytton, and traced a distinguished ancestry from 1373, when Reginald de Mutton, as the name was then spelled, was a Member of Parliament for the county town. Between that time and his own there were Myttons who left names honoured in the law and in the service of King and Country, and had always held a tight hand upon Halston; handing from father to son, a fine estate and a handsome rent roll.

John Mytton was born in 1794, and his father died two years later. His admiring friend and biographer, "Nimrod," gives us the picture of an unlicked cub, spoiled by the indulgence of his mother. Expelled from Westminster and Harrow schools and rusticated from Oxford, he was gazetted to a cornetcy in the 7th Hussars after Waterloo, too late to be taught anything on the battlefield, and just at the time when he came of age, and the estate, carefully managed during a long minority of nineteen years, fell to his own disposal. A rent roll of £10,000 a year and an accumulated sum of £60,000 only existed for him to dissipate as soon as possible; and he was not long about it. In four years he had left the army, and

come home to marry and be the Squire and a Member of Parliament, and to enter upon the wildest part of a career that squandered upwards of half a million sterling and brought him to an early grave in 1834.

The "hard-drinking, hard-swearing, hard-fighting and hard-hitting Jack Mytton" has left an immortal memory in North Shropshire. They tell still of his exploits; of how he only engaged a certain gamekeeper for the Halston coverts on condition that he should thrash a sweep supposed to lurk there. The gamekeeper accordingly went forth to battle and fought for his promised place, giving the sweep a thorough hiding. Hard-hitter though he was, the Squire met his match that day, for he was the Sweep! Another encounter, from whose gory twenty rounds he came victorious, was his set-to with a miner who had annoyed him when out with the harriers. The miner boasted himself a "tough 'un," but was knocked out of time. Mytton gave him half a sovereign and a hare, and told him to take it to Halston "and get another bellyful."

To his maniacal pranks there was no end. He once went duck-shooting on the ice in the depth of winter, naked, and a favourite amusement was to ride into the drawing-room in full hunting costume on the back of a tame she-bear. To put a guest to bed (dead drunk of course, for hospitality in those days could do no less, and both inclination and etiquette on the guest's

side did their part) in company with the bear and two bull-dogs was a prime joke.

One of his exploits is connected with the toll-gate that once stretched across the road just beyond the "Queen's Head." It lay, of course, on his way home from Shrewsbury, whither he had gone one day. Returning at some time between eleven o'clock and midnight, the turnpike man, roused out of his bed, and thinking the hour past twelve o'clock and another day come, insisted upon charging him another toll. It was a bitterly cold night, and the pikeman was glad enough to hurry back to bed.

Waiting until he had got between the bed-clothes, Mytton rode back and had him out again to open for him, and returned a little later to rouse the worried wretch once more from his slumbers with the cry of "Gate!" The man then returned the money and Mytton went home.

Among his eccentricities was an inordinate love of filberts. He and a friend ate eighteen pounds on one occasion, on the way down from London in his carriage, and when they reached Halston they were "up to their knees in nut-shells," as he declared. A sporting hairdresser of Shrewsbury, who generally supplied him with filberts, once said that he had sent two cartloads to Halston in one season. Perhaps he ate them to provoke a thirst, and certainly his exploits with the port equalled his consumption of

nuts, four to six bottles a day being his usual performance.

But he would drink anything. On one occasion, going into the establishment of the sporting hairdresser, he called imperiously for something, and taking down a bottle of lavender-water, knocked the head off and drank the contents. He said it would be "a good preservative against the night air."

In a comparison made by an admiring friend between him and the dissolute Lord Rochester of Charles II.'s time—a comparison showing Mytton to be Rochester's superior in every kind of extravagance and depravity—it was said that Rochester was drunk continually for five years, and Mytton beat him by seven. He had a breath like a wine-vault and a complexion like a beet-root, as a result of these excesses. They, naturally, did not lessen his extravagances, but never left him helpless. "Damn this hiccup!" he exclaimed one night, when standing in his nightshirt, about to get into bed, "but I'll *frighten* it away," that being the usually accepted theory of ridding one's self of that distressing spasm. So saying, he took a lighted candle and, applying it to the tail of his shirt, was instantly enveloped in flames. By the exertions of two friends, who rushed to his aid and tore the blazing garments piecemeal from him, he was saved from being burnt to death; but his only remark was, as he staggered, naked, to bed, "The hiccup is gone, by God!"

He ran his course to its appointed and inevitable end. The fine timber of his estate went to pay for his racing, hunting, gambling, and drinking extravagances, and for others still less reputable, and the estate followed. A relative remonstrated with him, and deplored the approaching necessity of alienating those ancestral acres. "How long," asked Mytton, "has the property been in the family?"

"Five hundred years," was the reply.

"Then," rejoined the reckless Squire, with an oath, "it is high time it went out of it."

Imprisonment for debt, and exile to the Continent came later. Brandy did what port could not, and sent the graceless scion of an ancient stock to his death-bed. His body was brought from London and laid among the ashes of worthier men, who had passed on to their descendants the patrimony they had received. Halston passed away with the Mad Squire to other hands, and his son lived and died landless, filling the position of bailiff to a Shropshire nobleman.

XXX

Up along the rise from Queen's Head, past Aston Park, where sepulchral burrows of prehistoric man are seen beneath the trees, the way

lies on to Oswestry. The town of "Odgerstree," as the country people call it, is entered soon after passing the old toll-house of Gallows Tree Gate. Once called Maserfield, it lost that name at an early date, and acquired its present title when history was very young indeed. It owes the name of Oswald's-tre, or Oswald's Town, to the Christian King Oswald of Northumbria, slain here in the year 642 in battle with the heathen Penda, King of Mercia. Oswald had taken the offensive, and as a raider only met his deserts; but the Church accounted him a martyr, made him a saint, and dedicated to him a religious house that in the course of time rose here. The parish church bears the name of St. Oswald to this day, and his Well, not so holy as it once was, may be found near by.

From the earliest times Oswestry was a fortified place. It stands two miles on the English side of Offa's Dyke, that boundary between the Welsh and the Saxons, and, occupying an advanced position, close upon the more rugged Welsh mountains, was greatly exposed to sudden inroads of the Welsh. Five miles away stood the great castle of Chirk, placed there to command the easy road from Wales into England by the Vale of Llangollen; but Oswestry was a fortified post and a market town in one. Sometimes it would be attacked; at others, the Welsh resorted to it as the only place where their needs could be supplied. In course of time the requirements of trade broke

down the barrier between the two nations, and Oswestry, from being a Saxon outpost where the roving Welshman, when caught, was surely put to death, became itself half Welsh. The results are plain to see, even now. Offa's Dyke, along almost the whole of its length, still sharply divides the two races, and only in the immediate neighbourhood of Oswestry is the division blurred and indistinct. Here English names and Welsh mingle, and each understands something of the other: even Welsh place-names exist on the English side of the Dyke.

The Civil War of Charles I.'s time was the last occasion of Oswestry being besieged. It was held for the King by a band of Shropshire loyalists who, to render themselves more secure against attack, partly demolished the tower of the church, standing outside the town walls and likely to afford the besiegers a great advantage. But the siege did not last long. A breach was made in the defences, and a youth named Cranage, "enlivened by the Parliamentary generals with wine," volunteered to go under fire and explode a petard at the Castle gate. The gate was blown in and the garrison surrendered.

After that period the Castle remained in ruins, and the town walls and gates were left to decay. So long ago as 1782 the work of removing the gates was begun, and now not a fragment remains. Of the Castle, once planted on a hilly site in the town, only some shape-

less walls in a public garden are left. When the craze for modernising Oswestry began, a hundred and twenty years ago, the market rights still belonged to the Earls of Powis, Lords of the Manor, who were paid "Toll-Thorough" on all goods entering the town, and on the gates being removed to widen the streets, the places where tolls were still payable were marked by carved stones. One of these may be seen in Church Street, on the site of the New Gate that stood until 1782. It occupies an eminently greasy position in the party-wall dividing two butchers' shops, and bears the words "Toll-Thorough" and the date. The arms of the Earls of Powis are still to be seen, boldly carved on it, but the Corporation purchased the market rights and abolished tolls in 1833.

History of the larger sort had then been done with, but some interesting happenings may be recounted. For example, the Princess Victoria passed through Oswestry with her mother, the Duchess of Kent, on her Welsh tour, *en route* for Wynnstay, August 4th, 1832—the tour that made King William IV. so indignant. It was "almost a Royal Progress," he said. Oswestry was a happy town that day. The Princess's carriage changed horses at the "Wynnstay Arms," the Honourable Thomas Kenyon presented a copy of the *History of Oswestry*, and everybody cheered. There was at that time a diary-keeping tradesman in the town, a Pepys in his little way, and a most engaging wrestler

with the art of spelling. He tells how "Tom Kinaston" (postboy at Knight's "Wynnstay Arms") "got drunk and whas turnd from Mr. Knites as Post Boy; alsow a woman kild at Winstay, thear being such a crowd to See the Royal Pursaneags. Oswestry was the seam as a wood from Pentrey Poeth to Betrey St. With rchs across the streets and frunt of the houses all covered with Laurel and ock."

The "Wynnstay Arms," mentioned in this amusing account, was the chief inn of coaching days, and remains much the same in appearance. It was once known as the "Cross Foxes," the two names meaning the same thing, for two foxes, "counter-salient," as the heralds say, placed back to back, form a prominent feature in the arms of the Wynnes of Wynnstay, the great landowning family of this district.

The Wynne arms are satirically referred to by Gwillim, who says: "They are not unlike Samson's foxes that were tied together by the tails, and yet these two agree; they came into the field like two enemies, but they meant nothing like fighting, and therefore pass by each other, like two crafty lawyers which come to the Bar as if they meant to fall out deadly about their clients' cause; but when they have done, and their clients' purses are well spunged, they are better friends than ever they were, and laugh at those geese that will not believe them to be foxes till they, too late, find themselves foxbitten."

Another charge in the old coat of the Wynnes is a spread eagle, referred to in the proud motto of the family: "Eryr Eryrod Eryri" = "The Eagle of the eagles of North Wales."

Much might be said of the Wynnes, if one had a mind to it, for each succeeding Sir Watkin has been a species of Providence to the district, from Oswestry to Llangollen, and many of them great sporting figures in North Wales. One of that long line has put upon record his method of conveying his rents to London in days of old. His precautions might well fit the escorting of a convoy through an enemy's country, and although dealing only with a period covering the close of the eighteenth and the opening of the nineteenth century, read like a mediæval romance.

First of all, the "fourgon," as he styles his carriage, was thoroughly overhauled, so that no defects might remain to cause a breakdown on the long and arduous four or five days' journey. Then the iron bullet-proof lining of the carriage was examined, and four of his most muscular gamekeepers selected to accompany him. All at last being ready, two keepers were seated on the box, each provided with a double-barrelled gun, and two others, similarly armed, in the dickey. Sir Watkin would personally superintend the loading of the carriage with the products of his rent-roll, and would then take his seat, accompanied by his land-bailiff. After a day's journey of between forty and fifty miles, the

coach would be drawn up at some hostelry well known to Sir Watkin, and the treasure guarded throughout the night by two of the keepers and by the two carriage-dogs which had trotted beneath the equipage all day. With such precautions, it is not altogether remarkable that the worthy Baronet's fortress on wheels was never attacked.

Carriage dogs—Dalmatian hounds or "plum-pudding" dogs—are not so fashionable as they were. Until recent years they were often to be seen trotting at an even pace under the carriages of the aristocracy and the wealthy during the London season, and were almost wholly kept for the sake of style and display. They were then, apart from being somewhat companionable and soothing to the nerves of restive horses, wholly useless; but—just as the waist-belt of a groom is the now meaningless survival of the necessary belt by which ladies riding pillion on horseback in the old days clung to the horseman—they had originally a very good reason for existence. Carriage dogs, in fact, date from more than two centuries ago, when families, travelling in their "chariots" between their country and their town houses, and often carrying great store of valuables with them, were always accompanied by these dogs, whose especial business was by no means comprised solely in keeping pace with the equipage. Indeed, the serious part of their profession only began when the wayside inn was reached, and

the carriage put up in the coach-house. Throughout the night they kept watch and ward over their master's goods; and ill fared the thief, or even the incautious stable-hand, who went near.

XXXI

Modern Oswestry is a place of engineering shops, foundries, and mining interests, and, as the seat of the Cambrian Railway locomotive and carriage works, is busy and prosperous. Not a vestige of its old trade in Welsh flannel remains, for the mills of Lancashire long ago began to produce a cheaper article than the Welsh could make. Very little of old Oswestry is left, and although the streets are still for the most part narrow and crooked, the greater number of the houses are modern. Inns abound in the grimy and slovenly place; a very different state of things from a hundred years ago, when Rowlandson and Wigstead came here and found it "remarkable for having (though rather a large town) the fewest public-houses we ever witnessed." No one is at all likely to raise that complaint in these times.

The road out of Oswestry passes close by two grassy hills crowned with trees, the original site, according to legend, of the town, and still

known as "Old Oswestry." The Welsh name them, and the ancient entrenchments that ring their summits, "Hen Dinas," or "Old Fort." Hidden away behind is Porkington, a historic estate whose real name is Brogyntyn, but thus vulgarised by the invading Saxon certainly as early as the reign of Henry III. Quite recently Lord Harlech, who now owns the estate, has re-adopted the original name, but "Porkington," after an existence of six hundred years, is not so readily forgotten.

The Great Western Railway crosses the road on the level, three miles out of the town, at Gobowen, on its way to Chester. Gobowen village itself is utterly commonplace, but marks the beginning of one of Telford's important alterations in setting out a new line of road, in place of the three miles of steep, circuitous, and narrow old road leading from here to the "Bridge Inn" at the crossing of the river Ceiriog. The old road is still in existence, and can be easily explored. It goes off to the left soon after the "Cross Foxes" is passed, beginning where a narrow lane, entered by a turnstile, runs between the "Railway Tavern" and a hideous Wesleyan Chapel: an atrocity in red and yellow brick and blue slates.

Having found the old road, you "dinna turn none," as the Shropshire country folks say, but go straight ahead, up hill and down dale, along a track that in every rut proclaims "old road," and "disused" in the grass and rubbish plenti-

ful everywhere along its course. At its further end, where the Ellesmere Canal is crossed, the rotting quays by the waterside are faced by a row of cottages and a little general shop, pushed suddenly into the background, as it were, when those two successive blows of fate—the making of the new road and the coming of the railway—took away both the wayfaring and the canal traffic. It is a picture of bygone prosperity and present ruin as complete as ever drawn of any deserted mining town in California.

The new road is the model of what a road should be; broad, level, and straight. It passes the estate of Belmont, and was indeed cut through a portion of the Park, sold to the Commissioners for the Parliamentary Road in 1820. To the ground sold for this purpose the Lovetts, who owned Belmont, agreed to add, as a gift, the site for a toll-house, afterwards erected and known as Belmont Bar. One condition was attached to this gift: that if within seventy years the toll-house should no longer be required, the ground should revert to the estate. The Shropshire gates were abolished towards the close of 1883, and the toll-house has, therefore, again become private property.

There is not a single dwelling near, or within sight of, that old toll-house, lonely by the wayside at the edge of a dark plantation: and the life of the old man who lives there rent-free on a small weekly allowance must be dull indeed. It would be lonelier and duller still were it not

for the tramps, whose footsteps can be heard stealthily crawling round the house and trying the doors and the shuttered windows at all hours of the night. They add a little spice of excitement to life in such a place; but an occupant who had anything to lose would be nervous. One night the old man discovered two navvies and a woman in his garden, preparing to camp out there. As they seemed to be genuine travellers on the way to a job of work, he brought them in, warmed them at his fire, and let them sleep by the hearth. Early in the morning they prepared to go, and made their breakfast before he rose. "God bless you, Daddy!" said the woman as they went, "we've left you something"; and he found a pound of sugar, a loaf, and some tea.

At the "Bridge Inn," where the old road comes down in a steep bank, all ruts and loose stones, to meet the new, the Ceiriog foams and splashes in its ravine. Across the bridge that spans it, and we are in Denbighshire and Wales. In Wales, after a fashion; but the steep road winding upwards to Chirk has to be traversed before the narrow opening into the valley of the Dee and the Vale of Llangollen is gained; and there were those at this strategic point in olden days who saw to it that unauthorised passengers did not pass. For as the village of Chirk crowns the plateau, so also does the Castle of Chirk command a cleavage in the hills, where Castell Crogen stood in days before

the existing fortress and the Norman builders of it were thought of.

Seven hundred years ago, this was just as it is now, the readiest road by which to enter North Wales. Accordingly, when Henry II. set himself to conquer the Welsh, and to stamp their national life out of existence, he led his army to the Ceiriog. There was fought the battle of Crogen, and when Henry had won it he pushed on across the rough country of the Berwyn mountains to Corwen. He had been better advised to advance by the more ample valley of the Dee, and the Vale of Llangollen; but Henry Plantagenet was the Buller of his age, and his rank bad luck and ill generalship combined caused him to lead his army the hardest way. Arrived at Corwen, amid the dense woods and thickets that then covered the hillsides, he found the chieftains of all Wales, having sunk their own quarrels for a time, assembled with a host of followers to bar his passage. They knew their wild country, he did not, and so, in fearful weather, commenced a disastrous retreat, and was not safe from pursuit until the walls of Oswestry were in sight. Not for him was the conquest of Wales. To a greater than he, in a hundred and twenty years' time, was to fall that achievement, and even when Llewelyn, the last independent Prince of Wales, was slain in 1282, and his country subdued, there yet remained the long-drawn rebellion of Owain Glyndwr that, was to break out a hundred and twenty years

later, and for ten years to imperil the English rule.

Castell Crogen gave place to the present castle of Chirk, built by Roger Mortimer of Wigmore, who murdered his ward, Gruffydd ap Madoc, to obtain possession. From that time this was one of the strongest fortresses on the Borders. In long years after the Mortimers, and many another family who had held it, had gone their ways, Chirk came into the possession of the Myddeltons. The first was a Sir Thomas, of Queen Elizabeth's time, who, from being a wealthy London citizen and Lord Mayor, became in 1595 the purchaser of this estate. His brother was the famous Sir Hugh Myddelton who brought the first water supply to London by the New River, and whose paltry stone statue, set up in modern times, stands at the beginning of this very road to Holyhead, on Islington Green. The son of the first Sir Thomas had some stirring experiences in the castle his father had bought. The spacious days of Elizabeth were done, and the bitter years of civil war had come to shake the country from end to end. This Sir Thomas was a man of changeable views. He at first took arms for the Parliament, and in his absence found his castle of Chirk seized and held for the King. He lay siege, and unsuccessfully, to his own house, then changed sides, and was himself besieged in it by his former allies to such effect that he was obliged to surrender. It cost this injudicious trimmer £80,000 to repair the damage done.

That Cromwell suffered his fortress to stand is sufficiently remarkable; but here it frowns to-day a splendid specimen of feudal architecture without, and a princely residence within.

XXXII

Chirk village in summer-time is enlivened by innumerable excursion parties on those days of the week when the Castle is thrown open; otherwise it is a dull little place, its only outstanding features that sometime coaching inn, the "Hand," and the church. The church is made, by the huge and numerous monuments within, to redound greatly to the honour and the glory of the Myddeltons, and the Myddelton-Biddulphs. Among others, two occupy the place on either side of the altar commonly reserved for the Decalogue, those ordinances being stowed away out of sight. The most amazing memorial of all is that to "Sir Richard Myddelton, Bart.," described as "great in his descent, great in his possessions," and, it may be added, greatest in his monument.

Here we bear sharply to the left, and, crossing an elevated ridge, come to the fringe of the Denbighshire coalfields at Black Park toll-house, superseded in 1824 by Whitehurst Gate just beyond, commanding not only the Holyhead

Road, but that to Cefn, Ruabon, and Wrexham as well, branching off to the right. The Road Commissioners sold the toll-house at Black Park for £10.

Crossing the Holyhead Road, just beyond Whitehurst, is Offa's Dyke itself, that famous boundary called by the Welsh *Clawdd Offa*, and regarded by them for centuries as an insulting mark of Saxon power. This is the point where the early frontiers marched; and England is English still on the hither side, and Wales Welsh on the other, in almost as striking a degree as when the earthen ditch and rampart were raised eleven hundred and fifty years ago. Chirk is thoroughly English; Vron, the next village, no less thoroughly Welsh. The merest trifles serve to show this. Ask the first person on the road what is yonder great structure straddling in the distance across the valley, and, if he be not actually a Welshman come from that direction, he will tell you it is "The Aqueduct." At Vron, on the other hand, the reply will be that it is "Pont Cysylltau." English, too, is the roadside conversation heard; immediately exchanged for Welsh on the other side of that old boundary.

Offa's Dyke, cut through as it is by the road, might very easily be missed in this land, where smooth fields are the exception and rugged pastures the rule. Its site is marked distinctly, however, by a farmhouse, named after it, "Plâs Offa," standing near the road. On the one hand,

the Dyke, very like an ordinary hedgerow, with great trees growing on the embankment, may be seen going uphill towards Chirk Castle; on the other it plunges, straight and resolute, steeply down to the river Dee. It is on this side that the Dyke shows at its best, with an embankment in places over ten feet high, and a ditch on its outer side, six feet deep and twelve broad.

OFFA'S DYKE.

Offa here built himself a monument more lasting than many of bronze or marble have proved.

But to return to Whitehurst Toll-house awhile. There the "fertile and happy" Vale of Llangollen first opens out before the traveller in a deep, long, and narrow vista closed by mountainous hills. It is the gate by which one enters the romantic land of Wales, that lies there in the setting sun like a Promised Land

THE VALE OF LLANGOLLEN.

flowing with milk, honey, and *cwrw;* the river Dee sparkling in the distance, and the last sun-rays lighting with a magic glow the hillsides and the precipitous Eglwyseg Rocks. A mediæval knight coming upon this profound valley and these crannied precipices would have halted and offered up the prayer, *In manus tuas Domine*, before going on his way, for the Unknown hid many terrors in those days, and Loathly Worms and unimaginable horrors might then have peopled the rocks. To the modern stranger, with none of these terrors, the scene also calls a halt. He sees the sun go down, lighting the hill-top roofs of Cefn and Acrefair with a mysterious glow, and glinting redly in the serried windows of Wynnstay; lights come out in cottage windows as day draws in, and signal lamps shine red and green on the great railway viaduct crossing the valley immediately beneath him; and it is well if he comes to this spot ignorant and unprepared, for then those colliery villages of Acrefair and Cefn, and the distant smoky shafts of Ruabon, hold many mysteries; the histories of the great railway viaduct and the canal aqueduct of Pont Cysylltau in the middle distance do not put a curb to his imagination, and the dim outline of Wynnstay, majestic in the crepuscule, might be not merely the French Renaissance and very Mansard-roofy, Alexandra-Palace-like residence of Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, the local magnate, but a fairy palace. Nor need the fiery dragon that should inhabit the fairy-like

and mysterious landscape be missing, for the lighted trains that come down the valley and cross the viaduct in thunder can well sustain the part to the eye.

It is surely in some early autumn evening, when stormy weather threatens not too insistent, and when kindly mists hide the hill-tops, rendering unlimited their possibilities of height and cragginess, that the exploring cyclist, say, should come to the Vale of Llangollen, previously uninstructed in what he is to find there on the morrow. It is to be premised, however, that he be not an unimaginative man. Let all such reach Llangollen by train in the glaring sun of a July afternoon, when everything is revealed, and imagination finds its occupation gone.

The stranger coming down the darkling road, past the little hamlet of Vron Cysylltau, and winding midway between the hills and the valley, obtains the true exploratory thrill. It is true that he will find, on after and daylight experience, that the road is a sandpapered one, onwhich the puzzle would be to find a rut or a loose stone; but he will proceed with the caution proper to a Livingstone or a Speke in unknown African wilds, and, when at last the lights of Llangollen begin to twinkle before him, will sigh with a great content for perils overpast, and rest at his inn.

Let us forbear in these pages to discuss the accommodation that Llangollen now affords. Is it not the business of the town—the town, mark

you!—to find accommodation for tourists of every sort, with the result that it is become a place of many hotels and boarding-houses, and very different from the tiny village of Llangollen that disgusted the travellers of a century ago, of whose one and "only tolerable" inn (he names the "Hand") Wigstead severely remarks: "Of the accommodation of that—*Cætera desunt*—" which, by some little freedom, may be translated "the less said the better"?

XXXIII

Our imaginary and imaginative traveller, waking at Llangollen to morning sunshine and matter-of-fact, will, if his mind is of the proper critical kind, be at once disappointed with the town and enthusiastic on its setting. Around it, shutting out the noisy world, rise the great heights of Barber's Hill and Castell Dinas Bran, the last-named a mighty eminence rising to a height of over a thousand feet, and diademed with a circlet of very ancient and time-worn ruins. If any one were known to have visited Llangollen and not to have climbed the steeps leading to "Crow Castle"—as it is called in English—on him or her would fall the righteous wrath of those who, much enduring, *have* made that toilsome pilgrimage. From this height you command not

only the town of Llangollen at its foot, diminished as though looked at through the wrong end of a telescope, but mile upon mile of heaped-up or overthrown mountains, tumbled and fantastic masses, growing at last indistinct in the direction of Snowdon; or, looking eastwards, see the Eglwyseg Rocks, a long range of mural precipices, curiously stratified, stretching towards Ruabon, with the Vale below their unscalable crags. The slate-works of bygone years have made little impression upon the scene, but they sufficiently impressed Ruskin, who speaks of "the Works (whatever the accursed business of them) on the north hillside."

In the rear of this fortified hill extends the region eloquently called the "World's End," where infrequent tracks lead to nowhere in particular, and the craggy descent of one hill but to the immediate toilsome ascent of another. Those who named the "World's End," named it well. The ruined Castle itself on this blusterous height is only a matter of rude walls; shapeless but for a tall fragment that shoots up above the rest and shows against the sky as you near the summit, like some gigantic cockerel in the act of crowing. Who built the Castle and who destroyed it are equally uncertain matters. Eliseg, Prince of Powis, occupied it in the eighth century and Gruffydd ap Madoc five hundred years later; that false Gruffydd who sided with the English under Henry III., and, later, founded Valle

LLANGOLLEN.

Crucis Abbey for the expiation of that and many other sins and wickednesses. But when these walls were unroofed, and by whom, no man knows.

The only architectural gem in these surroundings is that Abbey, two miles away in the Vale of the Cross, a transverse valley opening on to the Dee. There its ruins still nestle among the trees, just as Turner has pictured them, surrounded by the most fertile land within many miles. Men of Wrath might build themselves impregnable castles on shivery hill-tops, but holy monks knew a better way, and mortified the flesh in the fruitful and sheltered lowlands, where the fishponds were unfailing, the kine came lowing into byre at eventide, the corn was gathered in its season, and the fruit ripened early on sunny walls. But the habitations of wrathy and peaceable are alike overthrown, and both are the sport of the excursionist and the amateur photographer.

But now for more intimate grips with Llangollen, that "dirty, ill-built, and disagreeable town," as the Reverend Mr. Bingley described it in 1798. Many at that time told the same unflattering tale, and though it be out of date to-day, Llangollen as a town cannot, with the exception of the bridge across the Dee, be said to contain anything in the least beautiful or interesting. Only the lovely vale and the encircling mountainous hills render Llangollen endurable. One forgets the mean houses in the

beauty of the scenery. Dividing the place in half, the Dee flows noisily over a bed of rocky slabs and under that old bridge once regarded as one of the wonders of Wales. Engineering wonders are so plentiful nowadays that the mind, supersaturated with them, and the eye, accustomed to works on a gigantic scale, refuse to marvel at anything more. Only one wonder is left to the modern visitor to Llangollen—the wonder that Llangollen Bridge should ever have been considered a wonder. One has mentally to project oneself into the period when the bridge was built, over five hundred and fifty years ago, to understand why it was so considered. It was built when times were always disturbed, and when nothing in the nature of a town or a hard road existed here; and certainly they wrought well who built, for though the Dee has come down in floods innumerable, it still stands. It was doubled in width in 1873, and modern times have witnessed the coming of the railway up the vale along the course of the Dee, causing it to be lengthened by another opening. Four old pointed stone arches and a stone and girder span now make the total sum. Let the number here be specified, for the many travellers who have written on Llangollen exhibit a curious inability to give them correctly. Turner, whose view of Llangollen may be referred to, gives six, and in addition, places a viaduct on a hillside possibly intended for Castle Dinas Bran, in a

LLANGOLLEN. *After J. M. W. Turner, R.A.*

place where no viaduct or aqueduct ever was or could be. Those are, however, the merest trifles compared with his dealings with the Dee, represented as flowing in the opposite direction it takes in Nature, and upwards towards its source.

XXXIV

Llangollen owes its name to St. Collen, the patron saint of the parish church. "The name," says the Reverend W. Bingley, "is pretty enough, and of no great length." Sarcastic Mr. Bingley! Here is a portion of St. Collen's name, quoted by him:—"Collen ap Gwynawc, ap Clydawc, ap Cowrda, ap Caradawc Freichpas ap Lleyr Meirion, ap Einion Urth, ap Cunedda Wledig," and so forth, like recurring decimals. "Ap" being Welsh for "son of," it becomes quite evident that Collen's ancestry was, speaking in the decimal manner, corrected to at least six places. Welshmen, happily, have long ceased to thus trail their genealogical trees after them, and life in the Principality becomes simplified by so much. Nay, the "ap," for all the tenacity with which the Welsh cling to their nationality, is rarely in use nowadays, and has long been used as a kind of alloy, wherewith to coin new family names. From

this source come the patronymics of Price, Prichard, Probert, and other common Welsh surnames, once Christian; originally Ap Rhys, Ap Richard, and Ap Robert. "Prothero," too, derives from Ap Rhyddero, "Pugh" from Ap Hugh, and Bevan and Bowen from Ab Evan and Ab Owen. In the case of the Thomases and other names where the combination is impossible, the prefix has been generally abandoned, and so while the Scot and the Irishman retain their "Mac" and "Mc," Taffy has in this respect at least Anglicised himself.

St. Collen's Church is by no means beautiful or interesting, and its crowded churchyard is damp and dismal. It is the first on the journey along the Holyhead Road in which the Welsh language usurps the place of English, and here certainly, if even other signs were wanting, the Englishman—the "Saxon" as the Welsh called him—will find himself, to all intents and purposes, in a foreign land. The average educated Englishman, from whom the general sense, at least, of Latin epitaphs and those in two or three Continental languages is not hidden, stands mystified before these Cymric tombstones and, if he be of a reflective nature, finds it not a little humiliating that even the ragged little urchins in the streets of Welsh towns and villages are often bi-lingual, and in this respect better educated than he.

Among the few English epitaphs is one not often met:—

Our life is but a winter's day,
Some breakfast and away:
Others to dinner stay and are full fed;
The oldest man but sups and goes to bed.
Large is his debt who lingers out the day;
Who goes the soonest has the least to pay.

The subject of those lines had a short reckoning. He went (to pursue the simile) after lunch, dying in his nineteenth year.

The chief monument in the churchyard (ornament it is not) is the triangular pillar to those fantastical old frumps, the Ladies of Llangollen, and their servant. On it you may read of the "Amiable Condescension" of the one, the friendship of the other, and the faithful service of the servant. "It is believed," continues the epitaph, "they are now enjoying their Eternal Reward." Let us hope so——but what may be "the most appropriate reward in the hereafter for collecting old oak and entertaining society travellers along the Holyhead Road to tea and small-talk, it is not easy to imagine. Let us hope the Bricklayers, Cabinet-makers, Blacksmiths, and Bakers who lie around, with their trades all duly specified on their tombstones, also have *their* reward for well and truly bricklaying, cabinet-making, blacksmithing, and baking.

That Llangollen is not only geographically but socially in Wales is very evident, in the churchyard, in the names over the shops, and in the talk of the streets. Griffiths, Jones, Williams, Roberts, and Evans have it all their own way,

and are repeated over and over again, recalling the humorous story of how the Welsh originally got their names. Llewelyn—was it?—had spent a long time in naming the clans, and at last, growing weary of the work, said: "Let all the rest be called Jones!"

As for the talk, the bridge over the Dee is the place to hear Welsh. That favourite lounging-place becomes on market-days as noisy as a parrot-house with the excited talk of Welshmen black-haired and Welshmen red. Who can shout like a Welshman, and who but a Taffy or Frenchman works himself up into such gesticulating rages on such trivial occasions? Feather-headed pride, conceit, insincerity, treachery, fickle enthusiasms, religiosity, falsehood, and superstition, have always characterised the Welsh in the pages of history; but the modern Welshman is not superstitious, and has no faith in the wild legends of his own land, nor belief in the *diablerie* that was part of his grandparents' creed. He regularly attends the services of his hideous Calvinist-Methodist Chapel, and is as completely, religiously and politically, under the thumb of the Boanerges who ministers within as is the Irish peasant beneath the sway of the Romish priest. The Welshman clings fanatically to his nationality and his language, and is saturated with matter-of-fact Radicalism; but although he does not believe in the fairies, is careful not to speak ill of the little people," lest evil come of it; and although so pious, is commonly a shameless and resourceful

liar. Untruthfulness has always been a characteristic of Taffy, and judges have quite recently commented upon the prevalence of perjury in Welsh courts of law.

Education is advancing by leaps and bounds in the Principality, and sometimes lights heavily on the shoulders of some decent farmer's son, and constrains him thenceforth to walk the world an example of the perfect prig. Culture, in fact, brings all the acrid defects of the Cymric character into prominence, and impels those who have taken it badly towards political nostrums of unpatriotic bias, or social "movements" where the faddist shrieks and has his being.

XXXV

Llangollen was "discovered" in 1788 by those feminine Robinson Crusoes commonly called the "Ladies of Llangollen." Their singular story and the alliterative title have gone forth to all the world, and are familiar where the achievements of many worthier persons are unknown. If eccentricity may rightly be considered a proper passport to fame, then the Ladies of Llangollen are justly celebrated, but if the extraordinary mental obliquity that shaped their wasted lives be looked upon pathologically, the consideration they received in their time and the tolerant interest in them in later years must seem highly mischievous.

When the Ladies first came to Llangollen, the place was but a village on the post-road to Holyhead. The newly established mail-coaches went a different route, and only one inn—the "Hand"—existed for the accommodation of travellers. But, although the road was rough, and the accommodation matched it, this was the route by which travellers between London and Ireland came and went; and so although the village was less than one-tenth the size of the Llangollen of to-day, it could not have afforded that "romantic retirement from the world" the two Ladies are said to have desired.

These eccentrics were by no means of that age or those social surroundings that might reasonably be expected to dispose them to renounce the world, its pleasures, and its duties. One of them was extremely youthful; both enjoyed the advantages of good birth and social position. Lady Eleanor Butler, the elder, by some twelve years, of the two, was twenty-nine years of age, and was the daughter of that John Butler, Member of Parliament for Kilkenny, who in 1791 obtained the reversal of the attainder which had many years before deprived his family of the Earldom of Ormonde and Ossory: the Honourable Miss Ponsonby belonged to the Bessborough family. A favourite explanation of the friendship of the two is that they were disappointed in love, and thereafter determined to live for each other, apart from the world. It is an explanation that at any

rate, if quite unfounded, is evidence of a not unpleasing desire to seek romance in the most unlikely places. Lady Eleanor Butler was the originator and moving spirit in this eremitical enterprise. Tiny in stature, *petite* in figure, and overshadowed by the tall and commanding figure of her youthful friend, she at the same time possessed and retained during the whole of their career will-power for two. Several unsuccessful attempts to elope from their homes in the neighbourhood of Waterford took place before their relatives became unwillingly convinced that their eccentricity was quite unconquerable; but at last they were allowed to depart whither they would, their respective families doubtless expecting them back again so soon as the novelty of the escapade had worn off. In May, 1788, therefore, they left Waterford for Dublin, attended by their one servant, Mary Carryl, who shared their fortunes for upwards of forty years. Landing at Holyhead, they travelled for awhile in North Wales, seeking a suitable spot. That they did not readily find one seems to throw something of a sardonic sidelight upon the scheme; for even nowadays, when the tourist plumbs the deepest valleys and scales peaks often thought inaccessible, solitude is not difficult to achieve in this part of the world. Robinson Crusoe's island, or a solitary light-house, would not have suited their project, which, frankly, seems to have been the building up of a reputation for eccentricity in a spot

where it could readily be observed. As well might one, in these times, attempt to set up a solitary cell on the platform of Willesden Junction, and escape observation, as in those days play the hermit at Llangollen. Why, it was a halting-place on the great road between two kingdoms; with kings and princes, lords-lieutenant, peers, members of Parliament, and the whole social circle to which those two humbugs belonged travelling constantly to and fro throughout the year, within hail of their windows.

On the hillside sloping down to the great road they found a modest cottage, which, with some adjoining land, they purchased and commenced to convert into the odd museum it is now. They called it "Plas Newydd," and by that name it is now familiar to many thousands of summer visitors to Llangollen.

It was not long before the fame of this so-called "romantic" retreat spread to London; brought, doubtless, by some traveller whom the Ladies, as keenly alive to advertisement as any theatrical manager, had invited up from that not too comfortable hostelry, the "Hand." From that time forward a constantly increasing stream of callers presented letters of introduction at Plas Newydd, on their passage along the great road. Every one who was any one found a welcome there. Rank, fashion, art and literature, politics, were all represented in their visitors-books. Artistic and literary visitors left sketches

and sonnets, and presented autograph editions; rank and fashion gossipped and tittle-tattled and corresponded; and political and influential callers eventually made a Government pension possible to these precious "hermits." It was in 1788 that Lord Mornington wrote them, somewhat mysteriously, about some "arrears" in that pension which "he will not fail to interest himself in despatching," adding that "Mr. Pitt is acquainted with their situation and with the motive that so greatly recommends them to His Majesty's favour." What was that recommendation? What national service did the Ladies of Llangollen render that they should have received a Government subsidy? Is it possible that, in those palmy days of the Secret Service Fund, the Ladies were eavesdropping agents, gathering political gossip from Irish members travelling this road and reporting it to Downing Street?

In no real sense did these two friends retire from the world. Indeed, they visited all the best people within reach of a carriage-drive from Llangollen; but always, however far the distance, making it a point never to sleep away from home. Their costume was invariable, and strange. It consisted of riding-dress; with white stockings, shoes, beaver hats, stiff starched neckcloth, and short, powdered hair. Their coats were of decidedly masculine cut. Charles Mathews, who saw them occupying a box at the Oswestry Theatre when he was playing there in 1820, said they "looked exactly like

two respectable superannuated old clergymen." Their love of jewellery, however, was a distinctly

THE LADIES OF LLANGOLLEN. *From an Old Print.*

feminine trait, and was carried an inordinate length. Lady Eleanor had the Cordon of the

Order of St. Louis, presented by Louis XVIII.; and both wore a vulgar profusion of ribbons, brooches, and rings.

As time wore on, they came to know and be visited by every one of note. Wordsworth enjoyed their hospitality, and composed a sonnet, as a kind of votive offering, in the grounds: grounds graced by fonts and fragments of ancient crosses, stolen from Valle Crucis Abbey and other places, to fit the whim of these insatiable collectors of "curios." Wordsworth's offering was, sad to say, not accepted with enthusiasm. Why not? For the reason that he had dared to call their home a "low-roofed cot":—

> . . . Where faithful to a low-roofed cot,
> On Deva's banks, ye have abode so long:
> Sisters in love, a love allowed to climb,
> Even on this earth, above the reach of time.

The Ladies declared they could write better poetry themselves!

XXXVI

The great Duke of Wellington was, of course, well known to the Ladies. They had known him from a boy. It was from an old Spanish Prayer Book given him by Lady Eleanor that he learnt that language when going out to his campaigns in the Peninsula.

Reminiscences of this queer old couple abound in the published diaries and correspondence of old-time travellers; but none afford so good a picture as that drawn by Lockhart, who accompanied Sir Walter Scott on a visit to Llangollen in 1825. Lockhart, writing to his wife, says: "We proceeded up the hill, and found everything about them and their habitation odd and extravagant beyond report. Imagine two women —one apparently seventy and the other sixty-five—dressed in heavy blue riding habits, enormous shoes, and men's hats, with their petticoats so tucked up that at the first glance of them, fussing and tottering about their porch in the agony of expectation, we took them for a couple of hazy or crazy old sailors. On nearer inspection they both wear a world of brooches, rings, etc., and Lady Eleanor positively *orders*—several stars and crosses, and a red ribbon, exactly like a K.C.B. To crown all, they have cropt heads, shaggy, rough, bushy, and as white as snow, the one with age alone, the other assisted by a sprinkling of powder. The elder lady is almost blind, and every way much decayed; the other in good preservation. But who could paint the prints, the dogs, the cats, the miniatures, the cram of cabinets, clocks, glass cases, books, bijouterie, dragon china, nodding mandarins, and whirligigs of every shape and hue—the whole house, outside and in (for we must see everything, to the dressing closets) *covered* with carved oak, very rich and

fine some of it; and the illustrated copies of Sir Walter's poems, and the joking, simpering compliments about Waverley and the anxiety to know who McIvor really was, and the absolute devouring of the poor Unknown, who had to carry off, besides all the rest, one small bit of literal *butter* dug up in a Milesian stone jar lately from the bottom of some Irish bog. Great romance (*i.e.*, absurd innocence of character) one must have looked for; but it was confounding to find this mixed up with such eager curiosity and enormous knowledge of the tattle and scandal of the world they had so long left. Their tables were piled with newspapers from every corner of the kingdom, and they seemed to have the deaths and marriages of the antipodes at their fingers' ends. Their albums and autographs, from Louis XVIII. and George IV. down to magazine poets and quack doctors, are a museum. I shall never see the spirit of blue stockingism again in such perfect incarnation. Peveril (a family name for Sir Walter) won't get over their final kissing match for a week. Yet it is too bad to laugh at these good old girls; they have long been the guardian angels of the village, and are worshipped by every man, woman, and child about them."

The collecting mania grew upon the old women with the passing of the years. They had long converted their cottage from a labourer's dwelling to the likeness of a curiosity shop, and had begged or bought all the ancient Elizabethan,

Carolean, and Jacobean carved wooden four-poster bedsteads within a circle of twenty miles from Llangollen, to decorate the interior and exterior of Plas Newydd; but their passion for old oak was insatiable. The posts of the black oak porch and the other profusely carved oak decorations that front the house to this day were placed here by them. Here is still the famous carved frieze of cat and acorns that they went into raptures over, and opposite is the little dog, also in black oak, with which, after years of anxious waiting and searching, they matched the cat. So wedded to this passion for old oak did the Ladies become that no one was welcome as a visitor who did not bring with him an offering of this sort. They were proud of their house. "When we fust came home," Lady Eleanor was wont to say, drawing a word-picture of the place, "then and afterwards, we had only bare walls and a roof." Then they would point out the trees they had planted in the garden; and the laylocks that made so fragrant a bank of blooms in the spring. (They, in common with others of their order, continued to say "fust," and "laylock," and "obleege" when merely common people had adopted what is now the usual pronounciation.)

Well, well: the trees are more beautiful now than ever they could have been before, but the ladies are gone. Their servant died in 1809; Lady Eleanor, in her 90th year, in 1829, and Miss Ponsonby two years later. But the interior

of the house is much the same: rich in oak so black as to absorb much of the light; with a wealth of beautiful old china and miscellaneous odds and ends that would have delighted the soul of Horace Walpole. These collections owe much of their completeness to the late General Yorke, who had known the two ladies, and

PLAS NEWYDD.

rescued the houseful of curiosities from utter dispersal at the sale by auction, conducted by that George Robins whose extravagant auctioneering eloquence has become a classic. In his words, the grounds of Plas Newydd occupied "a wooded knoll, overhanging a deep and hallowed glen"; language that may compare favourably with Wordsworth's sonnet.

We have seen Lockhart excusing himself for laughing at these "good old girls," as he calls them, and have his word for it that they were "the guardian angels of the village"; but whatever they may have done in their lifetime has been quite thrown into the background by the posthumous benefits their fame has conferred upon Llangollen. Local charities until recently benefited largely from the fees charged to visitors curious to see the collections at Plas Newydd; but since a party of thieves and vandals broke some of the objects and stole others the house has not been so readily accessible. It would be quite impossible for a stranger to visit Llangollen for even the shortest space of time and then to come away ignorant of the Ladies, for photographs of them, statuettes, and paintings abound at every turn, and must prove an important source of revenue. It is no more possible to flee from the Ladies of Llangollen in Llangollen than it is to avoid Lorna Doone at Ilfracombe, or Shakespeare at Stratford-on-Avon.

XXXVII

The settlement of "The Ladies" here synchronised with the appreciation of the picturesque in rural scenery, then a new-born and strange portent. The only travellers along this road into

Wales had been those who were obliged to take the journey on business; pleasure in travelling—pleasure in such solitary and rugged scenery—was quite out of the question, and if travellers remembered Llangollen at all, it was as a place where the coach changed horses, and where the one inn afforded the worst cheer at the highest prices. But in the last quarter of the eighteenth century the tourist sprang suddenly into existence. None were more astonished than the Welsh peasantry at this strange spectacle of people who had riches and comfort in their own homes travelling for pleasure and delight in their mountains and rivers; aye, and often walking, not for economy, but for love of that exercise, in strange places. Sometimes the astonished Welshman was incredulous. He would ask, "Where do you come from?" "Why do you come here?" and "Where do you go to from hence?" and, dissatisfied with the answers received, would ask, "Are there, then, no mountains or rivers in England?"

One of these early tourists was Warner, author of a "Picturesque Tour." Arriving at Llangollen on their walk through Wales of over a century ago, Warner and the companion of his pedestrian tour went, of course, to the "Hand." But that then solitary inn of the place could not attend at once to the tired and hungry tourists. Much more important guests than dusty-footed travellers (always at that time regarded with suspicion) were occupying the

attention of the establishment. These were the Margrave of Anspach and his suite, who came, undoubtedly, in carriages, and whose dinner the wearied couple could distinctly smell. Abashed, they went to contemplate the beauties of Valle Crucis, what time the Margrave dined. It is not surprising that they did not altogether care for the place. Empty bellies are not kindly critics of architectural ruins. But what *does* surprise the reader of their tour is that they went on and explored the mighty hill of Dinas Bran before returning to the "Hand," when, the Margrave and his suite, even down to the footmen and page-boys, having fed to repletion, they found, at last, some attention.

It would seem, judging from an expression used by Daniel O'Connell, that the hotel now called the "Royal," but originally named the "King's Head," was established by some action on the part of the Ladies of Llangollen. The "Hand" was in those days notoriously ill-equipped, and O'Connell wrote in the visitors' book of the "King's Head":—

> I remember this village with very bad cheer,
> Ere the Ladies, God bless them, set this inn here;
> But the traveller now is sure of good fare,
> Let him stay at this inn, or go to that 'ere;
> But all who can read will sure understand
> How vastly superior's the Head to the Hand.

The sign of the "King's Head" was changed to the "Royal" after the visit of the Duchess of Kent with the Princess Victoria in 1832.

VALLE CRUCIS ABBEY. *After J. M. W. Turner, R.A.*

XXXVIII

When the traveller sets forth from Llangollen, he does so primed with stories of the excellence of the scenery and the road. The folded mountains, some clothed with pine and larch to their very summits, others stern and jagged with rocks, far exceed any word-picture, as do also the valleys and the glittering course of the Dee, dashing impetuously over boulders and pebbly beaches, or more rarely sliding quietly where the trout lurk in deep and darkling pools, where the Welshman still navigates that early British canoe or boat—whichever you like to call it—the "coracle," a craft that no Saxon can master. The scenery is exquisite, the air cooler and more refreshing as you leave Llangollen, and the road broad and hard.

But as you come past Berwyn station, that picturesque little place on the railway line running so neighbourly and yet inoffensively parallel with the road and the Dee, you are conscious, whether awheel or afoot, that the road is not by any means flat. The old coachmen, indeed, knew this, although imperceptible to the casual eye, to be one of the most trying rises on the way to Holyhead; and the modern cyclist, who pedals bravely up its two miles, thinks sadly upon the debilitating air of Llangollen until its crest is reached and he perceives the true state of affairs. Telford was confronted

by a dilemma here. He could do either of two things: carry the road thus steeply over the ridge of Rhysgog, or take it in more level fashion, but in three parts of a circle, following the great bend the Dee makes at this point—a bend so great that it almost coils back upon itself. He chose the first course, and so, although he saved more than a mile, has punished all travellers that have used the road since then.

Emerging from the sombre plantations that darken the greater part of the rise, the road, terraced on the shoulders of the hills, runs down to Glyndyfrdwy, passing the toll-house of that name, and coming to the village where the "Sun" inn stands on the left, on entering. This is the little "pot-house called the 'Rising Sun,'" mentioned by Colonel Birch-Reynardson, one of the places where the Holyhead Mail changed horses when he took the reins. Across the river is Llansaintffraid, which gave a name to a toll-house here—one of the few that have been demolished.

At the other end of Glyndyfrdwy, passing that pretty, tree-shaded anglers' house, the "Berwyn Arms," the hills recede and the valley opens out. The Mail at one time changed here. In those days it was called the "New Inn." Just before the scenery becomes comparatively homely, two strikingly prominent hills or tumuli, at a short distance from one another, are seen overhanging the

Dee. The second of them, standing isolated and crowned with a spindly group of fir trees, is known as "Owain Glyndwr's Mount," and there are those among the great Owain's worshippers who still affect to see the foundations of his house in the rolling meadow beneath.

Owain Glyndwr is one of the greatest and latest of Welsh national heroes, and the valley of the Dee is especially linked with his memory.

OWAIN GLYNDWR'S MOUNT.

It could scarce be otherwise, for his name of Glyndwr was a territorial one, and derived from his ancestral estate situated here at Glyndyfrdwy and for some miles along the Dee between Berwyn and Corwen.

It was in the year 1400 that Owain rose in rebellion and set all Wales aflame against the English. He was no hot-headed patriot, rising for the mere idea of throwing off a foreign yoke, but a man who had suffered wrongs and

sought redress in vain. Lord Grey of Ruthin, one of the powerful Lords Marchers, had seized a portion of his land, held it by force of arms, despite the decision of the Courts in London, and represented the injured man to be a rebel who refused the feudal duty of sending help to aid the King against his opening campaign against the Scots. Hitherto he had been no rebel, but a loyal supporter of the English rule, at that time long established firmly in Wales. Not only so, but he had moved in the Court circles of that day, and was not only an educated gentleman, but a personage of wealth, consequence, and influence in his own country, and precisely one to be well treated by politic rulers.

Glyndwr was driven into rebellion, if ever man was. He was no youth, but a man of forty-two years of age when matters came to this crisis. He was also one of skill and resource, and, before the provocative Grey could do much, had burnt his town and castle of Ruthin, and, turning towards England, advanced with fire and sword up to the very walls of Shrewsbury. Fortune smiled from that time, first upon one and then upon the other side. English expeditionary forces under the young Prince of Wales drove Glyndwr back, and burnt his ancestral halls at Sycherth and Glyndyfrdwy, and yet when stress of weather warned the English to retreat, Glyndwr, unconquered, was snarling at their heels. Later, he himself

assumed the title of Prince of Wales, and in royal manner entered into a tripartite alliance with Hotspur and Mortimer to dethrone Henry IV. and divide England and Wales between them. And had the Battle of Shrewsbury been decided the other way there can be little doubt of their success.

The Welsh bards and seers had been very busy with prophecies and portents even at his birth, and Shakespeare—who thought Welshmen excellent subjects to make fun of—has used these forebodings and Glyndwr's rising arrogance with effect in that scene of *Henry IV.* where the allies meet at Bangor. "At my birth," says Glyndwr—

> The frame and huge foundation of the earth
> Shak'd like a coward.

"Why," retorts Hotspur, "so it would have done at the same season if your mother's cat had but kitten'd, though you yourself had never been born."

"I can call spirits from the vasty deep," adds Glyndwr; to which the unromantic Hotspur observes:—

> Why, so can I, or so can any man;
> But will they come when you do call for them?

It is plain, if we take the Shakespearean view, that there were never such ill-assorted allies as Hotspur and Glyndwr. The one boasts, in true Welsh style, that no man is his equal,

and Hotspur is only ready to allow that no man speaks better Welsh.

Had this alliance been successful, Glyndwr's sovereignty was to extend over Wales and to include all the territory comprised within a line drawn from the Mersey to Burton-on-Trent, and from thence to Worcester and the mouth of the Severn. But he distrusted Hotspur, even if he was frank with Mortimer, who had become his son-in-law; and when Hotspur advanced from the Scottish borders to give battle to Henry IV. at Shrewsbury, left him to fight a hopeless struggle against overwhelming numbers. Had Glyndwr been a true ally and joined forces Shrewsbury Fight would have had a different ending. But, cursed with those streaks of treachery and suspicion that mar the character of the Celt, Glyndwr let his ally be destroyed, and with that desertion wrought the eventual failure of his own ambitions. This is no place to follow his fortunes, rising and falling in a long and hopeless struggle. Successes he had in plenty, and he laid the greater part of Wales waste, but Saxon tenacity wore him down in the long run. After a romantic career, he at length became a beaten fugitive, and at the last fades out of sight, in 1416. No man knows where or when he died; but legends connect the little village of Monnington, in Herefordshire, with his obscure end.

The Welsh bards who twanged their harps in Owain's halls, and ate his food and swilled

his sack and metheglin, did him an ill service when they sang of the deeds he was to do and the glory that was to be his. His halls are gone, and only traditions and the researches of the antiquary preserve his story. His Mount stands still by the roadside, and vague stories of how he stood here and watched for the approach of his enemies are told; but one may have a shrewd suspicion that it is only your literary Welshman who nowadays knows or cares much about him.

XXXIX

More in accord with modern Wales is Llansaintffraid, across the Dee, with its trim lodging-houses and villas, and little railway-station which the railway authorities, alarmed at the name of Llansaintffraid, have christened by the simpler title of "Carrog." More villas, more lodging-houses, and many tourists mark the approach to Corwen, a village or townlet that does not favourably impress the stranger fresh from Llangollen. No one could with truth say that the houses of Llangollen are beautiful, but the scenery there makes full atonement: at Corwen the scene is tame, the hills recede, and the Dee flows through a wide valley. Just here, where the town should be especially attractive, it is mean at the best, and at its worst downright ugly. Moreover, the railway company

has deliberately chosen to place its coal-sidings and engine-sheds alongside the road and abutting upon the old Dee bridge.

Opinions upon Corwen are singularly unanimous through the course of over a hundred years. In 1797 Wigstead must have found it at its worst. The houses were then, he says, of clay and loam, and "most miserable hovels: the people, cows, asses, hogs, and poultry all live in one apartment, and all turn out at the same time in the morning." The following year, another tourist finds Corwen a "disagreeable little town"; and in modern times the kindliest of itinerists has nothing better to say of the place than that "the tourist will not find much to detain him" in it.

The little that does suffice to detain him centres in the old church whence the name of the town derives, Cor Wen meaning White Choir. No longer white, but on the contrary, greyish-black and unlovely, the church stands behind the houses of the long street, and immediately under a huge pile of cliff-like rocks called Pen-y-Pigyn, crowned by a flagstaff, whence Owain Glyndwr is said to have cast his dagger, in some unexplained fit of anger. It is a legend stupidly invented to account for the rudely incised figure of a cross, resembling a short sword, seen in the granite slab now built as a lintel into the south porch. A battered old churchyard cross stands near the west door, and several old slate tombstones with two semicircular hollows, are to be seen, cut in this manner to receive the knees of those who came to pray by

the graveside of their dead. On the southern side of this churchyard, more melancholy than most, a row of almshouses, called "Corwen College," may be noticed; built in 1750 for six widows of Merionethshire clergymen, who may thus meditate among the tombs from morn to eve on the evil fate that left them widows before their husbands had attained to fat prebends, decanal dignities, or the culminating honours and riches of an episcopal throne.

The odd effigy of Iorwerth Sulien, an early vicar of the church, divides with the fine old timber roof the honours of the interior.

The "Owen Glendower" inn at Corwen has long since lost the "fierce gigantic figure like that of some Saracenic Soldan" that once served for a sign, and attracted the attention of every eighteenth-century traveller; and has in other ways altered since the time when the first tourists came, note-books in hand. It must be confessed that the first tourists in Wales are now become highly amusing where they intended to be improving, and not a little dull when their intent was jocular. One of them who says he was "Josephus Rex," is not a little obscure at first, but presently we find that phrase to be a ponderous play upon words, and that, in short he meant he was Jo King — joking. You take him, do you not? How exquisitely pretty a wit!

Such an one as this must have been the Rev. Mr. Evans who, in 1795, toured the Principality. He found "decent accommodation, and pointed

civility at Corwen, where others had found nothing of the kind; but it was stupid of him to ask for a "tonsor" when he meant "barber," and wanted a shave. Instead of bringing him a tonsor, they brought him a blind harper. He retained the harper, but still clamoured for his shave; whereupon, a "blooming damsel of twenty-five years" came with razors, soap and hot water, and deftly scraped his chin.

Most of Corwen's business activity is centred in its railway-station at the further end of the town, where roads divide like the two arms of the letter Y; one, to the left, going to Bala, and the other for Holyhead. Here those two leviathans, the Great Western and the London and North-Western Railways, meet and go their several ways to Barmouth and to Rhyl. Beyond, for twenty-two miles, there is a vast expanse of country where no railway goes, and if Corwen wants to visit Bettws-y-Coed and Bettws desires to return the call, they have either to take the road or else embark upon a roundabout railway journey of fifty miles. The engineering works for a line that should connect the two along the Alwen, Geirw, and Conway valleys would not be so very great; the difficulty perhaps lies in the question, which of the rivals is to do it? Meanwhile, one passes over the ancient bridge that spans the Dee on six lichened arches, and bids good-bye to the modern world for awhile just as effectually as Borrow did when he tramped the road fifty-five years ago.

It is at first a tame road, by comparison with

the scenes left behind, and it is not until the "Druid's Head" inn—or what once was that hostelry—is passed that its character grows wild. The old toll-house of Maes Mawr and the "Cymro Goat Inn" mark the change in pleasant fashion by a bridge at the confluence of the Alwen and the Geirw. Their *cwrw* at the "Goat" (whether it be a Billy or a Nanny is no matter) is better than their English, and the traveller is little likely to make himself understood, unless he be as clever a Saxon as Borrow himself, who lost no opportunity of showing the astounded Welshmen that he understood their language. Imagination pictures what he would have done, after several highly critical pulls at his tankard. "Maes Mawr," he would have asked, "that means 'great meadow'; that is it, I suppose, across the road?" pointing to a pasture under the lee of the hills; and, when he had been answered in the affirmative, telling his astonished host the history of it, carefully "got-up" before-hand.

Here you meet few people besides farm-hands and drovers. Of drovers plenty, urging their small Welsh sheep and their bony cattle to market. If you be at all curious you remark, perhaps, that the sheep are small. "Yess," says the drover, "they wass ferry small sheeps whateffer. They wass take them from the mountains to make the other sheeps petter. They will be"—here they break away suddenly, and the drover hurries after them with an opening "Tam!" swallowed up in a torrent of Welsh expletives.

XL

From Maerdy Post-office, half a mile onwards, commences a steady rise of nearly two miles, the uplands on the right presently culminating in the crags of Cader Dinmael, and the valley of the Geirw on the left gradually deepening and contracting into a profound and narrow gorge; the road running round cornices of rock, fenced by breast-high masonry on the one side, and overhung by rocky cliffs on the other. With boring-tools, pickaxe, and blasting-powder, Telford forced a way for his road round this shoulder of the mountain and converted what had been a narrow and dangerous track into a smooth highway, thirty-six feet in width. This is the spot rightly called in the old road-books "the romantic Pass of Glyndyffws," and the bridge that seems to hazardously leap the gorge where the Geirw plunges and foams is identical with the "Pont-y-Glyn-Bin"—the Bridge of the Glen of Trouble—named by Borrow. Very justly he speaks of this as "one of the wildest and most beautiful scenes imaginable," and of the bridge as "a kind of Devil's Bridge, diabolically fantastical, flung over the deep glen and the foaming water."

"Projecting out over the ravine," he continues, "was a kind of looking-place, protected by a wall forming a half-circle, doubtless made by the proprietor of the domain for the use of

the admirers of scenery. Cut on the top surface of the wall, which was of slate and therefore easily impressible by the knife, were several names, doubtless those of tourists who had gazed from the look-out, amongst which I observed, in remarkably bold letters, that of T******"

Borrow would have been more correct in his surmise if he had given the credit of this little balcony built out from the road to Telford. He it was who designed that little look-down into the depths, together with a few others along this road at particularly favourable view-points, thus proving his own appreciation of scenery and the possession of that artistic sense denied engineers by architects, who, as a body, are the most intolerant, opinionated, and barbarous set of professional men in existence, ready to ruin an old building for an idea, or to destroy the artistic work of one period to replace it with modern imitations of the especial style that suits their individual opinion.

Glyndyffws (how fearful and wonderful these Welsh names!) is lovely beyond expression. Nowhere else are the mountain-ashes and the scrub-oaks more exquisite than here, where they are seen clinging tenaciously to the jagged ledges of the ravine, soaked continuously in the moisture thrown up from the tortured water below, and clothed in every twig and wizard limb with moss and lichens. This, of course, was a spot that most powerfully impressed the imaginations of old travellers. Hear one of them. He speaks of the

"deep and dismal chasm through which the hoarse-sounding torrent roars over the disjointed rocks beneath, and, lashing the rocky sides that check its impetuosity, rolls its angry waters to the Dee." But we have not done with him yet. He goes on to describe the "stupendous fissure fully two hundred feet deep, overhung by large forest trees," and continues in that strain to a wearisome length, until, in fact, we tear ourselves away, catching as we go such disjointed phrases as "awful scene," "maddened torrent," "profundity of horrible bed," and so forth. That old tourist, fortunately for himself, did not visit Snowdon, after so recklessly expending all his adjectives on the way. Had he done so, he must surely, bankrupted in phrases, have, in presence of Snowdon's grandeur, become a literary insolvent, paying the equivalent of a farthing in the pound.

Leaving Pont y Glyn and its "tremendous roar" behind, "the prospect," according to a century-old wayfarer in these wilds, "becomes as uninteresting as Bagshot Heath." But scarcely so. That Heath has no mountains enlivening the distance, nor a clear and beautiful stream trickling in little sharps and trebles through a solitary valley, such as this. Indeed, the hamlet of Tynant passed, where a shop, an inn, a chapel, and some scattered farmsteads in the cwms or on the hillsides comprise the whole, the rest of the way to Cerrig-y-Druidion is singularly beautiful in the open and unfenced sort. The name of Tynant alone, which means

the "House by the Stream," points to a solitude once greater than now, when the inn was the only house here.

It was to this quiet spot, by the sparkling trout stream, that Dick Vickers, who once drove the Holyhead Mail between here and Shrewsbury, retired, as Colonel Birch-Reynardson relates. He had been in early days a postboy, and had then performed the feat of driving "His Honour," of Pradoe, from that place to London faster than the fastest. "His Honour" was posting up to town in a light barouche, and reached the "Lion" yard at Shrewsbury just as the "Wonder" was starting. "Dick," said the squire, "I wonder whether I could beat the 'Wonder' into town; I should like to do it if I can." And, in short, it was done, that celebrated coach coming in a bad second.

But steady and careful as old Time was little Dick when on the bench. "Little Dick" they called him because "he had to get on sixpennyworth of halfpence to look on the top of a Stilton cheese," and those cheeses are of no great stature. In an evil hour he gave up the ribbons and set up as a farmer at Tynant, where, when his day's work was done, he had been used to fish the little stream. But farming was a very different matter from driving four horses, and he lost his money in it, and so one ill day they found him hanging from a beam in one of his barns.

Flat for four miles to Cerrig-y-Druidion, with

spreading moors ahead, the village itself stands prominent on a knoll, with an old road going to its bleak and hard-featured street, and the Holyhead Road just skirting its fringe. Cerrig-y-Druidion means "the rock of the Druids."

"This place," says Warner, "as its name imports, was connected with the awful superstitions of the ancient Britons, and exhibited some years since vestiges of Druidical worship."

CERRIG-Y-DRUIDION.

These vestiges were British stone huts or tombs —the "kistvaens" of archæological literature. Warner and the peasantry thought them to be prisons, but, whatever they were, they have long since disappeared; only the rocky site—like a granite island rising from the surrounding level —remaining to give a reason for Cerrig's name. It is curious to reflect that the village of Crick in Northants, was originally Cerrig, and that the name of Carrick, in Ireland, has a similar

meaning. Only in England, where ages ago "the coiling serpent" (as the Welsh call the advancing Saxon) established himself and expelled the Celt, has the word been corrupted. When Borrow came to Cerrig-y-Druidion he says he stayed at the "Lion—whether the white, black, red, or green Lion I do not know." It was, in fact, the "White Lion," which still protrudes a battered and weather-beaten sign over the bye-street, while the "Saracen's Head" stands boldly upon the main road. How he met the Italian who spoke Welsh, and on the morrow met the Irish fiddler with the game leg and the infernal cheek, let the pages of *Wild Wales* relate.

XLI

The scattered cottages and old toll-house of Glasfryn bring one to Cernioge, the place to which the milestones have been insistently directing, since Corwen. What, the stranger wonders, is this place ("Kernioggy" the Welsh pronounce it) that it should be thus dignified? Well, here it is, just a farmhouse lying back from the road, with a pond beside it under the trees, a few outbuildings, and an older toll-house than the Glasfryn one. Not, nowadays, a very striking spot, except for its remote solitude; yet this,

in the old days of road-travel, was a quite famous inn and posting-house, a stage between Bettws-y-Coed and the "Druid's Head." The inevitable reflection here is that if it was to such lonely places as this that travellers of old were glad to come, exclaiming with delight as to their comfort, how discomfortable must travelling then have been!

The older toll-gate standing close by, and early deserted, was found to be inconveniently close to the inn, and certainly no postboy, having been halted at the gate for toll, could in the few remaining yards drive his patrons up to the house with the flourish and circumstance that the times demanded. It is all very well nowadays, when even a first-class fare between London and Holyhead only costs a trifle over two guineas, for the traveller to leave the railway station in the decent obscurity of a cab; but, in times when a journey between those places might cost anything from thirty to fifty pounds sterling, travellers liked some pomp and circumstance for that expenditure. And they generally obtained it, for when travelling was so costly that few but the well-to-do were found upon the roads, and when the guest at an inn was wont to drink many bottles of the best port, it was eminently desirable he should be received and despatched with the greatest show of consideration.

"Cernioge Mawr"—or "Great Cernioge"—was the full name of the place. George Borrow conceived it to have derived from "Corniawg,"

CERNIOGE.

which means a place with many chimneys or turrets; certainly not descriptive of the existing house, but perhaps so in remote days when an old mansion stood here, its gables and clustered chimneys prominent to wayfarers in this solitude while they were yet far off, down the road.

The accommodation at Cernioge, whose sign, by the way, was the "Prince Llewelyn," seems to have varied considerably at different times, and somewhat over a hundred years ago it appears to have been very bad. Some tourists in 1795, hearing that the inn kept three chaises and a post-coach, assumed a larder to match, but found "not a single article of food that even hungry appetites could relish. Another, three years later, in speaking of the house as "a solitary inn, in the midst of a desert, chiefly intended for the accommodation of the coaches which run this road," talks bitterly of the larder "in unison with the population of the country: nothing to be had but a leg of mutton, which it seems was tripping over the dark brown heath about three hours ago."

By 1836, however, a change had come over the scene, for another tourist is found to speak of the "comforts and accommodations not being exaggerated"; but by that time its day was almost done. Another ten years saw the road exchanged for the rail, and Cernioge became what it is now, a farm.

Beyond this sometime inn the road descends,

and "Snowdonia"—a term invented by Pennant a hundred and thirty years ago—opens up before the advancing explorer; a majestic disarray of of tumbled peaks and lesser hills, smeared across with trailing mists. Then, in two miles, comes the hamlet of Pentre Voelas, with the "Voelas Arms," a slate-fronted inn, by the way, displaying a very elaborately blazoned coat-of-arms over its door. "Toujours Prest" says the motto under that family scutcheon, and a very good motto too. Let us hope it has always been descriptive of the inn also, and that it, unlike Cernioge, was "Always Ready."

From this point it is a seven-mile descent to Bettws-y-Coed and the Vale of Conway: a descent beginning gradually and gently, with pleasant scenery on either side, and culminating in a two-mile length of steep and winding road, with towering rocks overhanging on the one hand, and a deep wood-enshrouded valley on the other. Beside the road stands an inscribed stone that tells how Llewelyn ap Seicyllt, an obscure Prince of Wales, was slain in 1021.

Passing Henresea toll-house at five and a half miles from Bettws, the rocky chasm is skirted where the Conway boils and frets and splashes over obstructing boulders, or flows swiftly and with an unwonted calmness over some reach of smooth-slabbed rock. At the bridge of Glan Conway, where the road is taken across, is one of these quiet interludes. The

water glides with a silent swiftness, infinitely impressive, over rocks clothed in moss, as it were in green velvet: the "Lincoln green" of Robin Hood and his merry men. Deep pools, a little aside from the main current, have the hue of dilute stout and porter; as though a raft freighted with Barclay and Perkins' best had made grievous shipwreck here; shallower pools resemble brown sherry, and the sliding main stream, threaded with gold by the glancing sunlight, resembles some god-like brew of nectar or ambrosia, tipped into the kennel and run to waste by the fanaticism of some celestial Wilfrid Lawson.

The Conway presently plunges quite out of sight below the mountain road that winds on a cornice at Dinas Hill, lodged midway between the depths and the heights, and buttressed by sturdy masonry against sliding down into the woods whose tree-tops are seen far below. Away ahead, blocking a long valley, the great peaked mountain of Moel Siabod rises up and pretends to be Snowdon; imposing on many a confiding stranger with its 2,800 feet and bold outline, and discounting the real view of Snowdon, 700 feet higher, but not so effectively seen, at Capel Curig.

This profound valley, or rather, meeting-place of valleys, is a kind of rendezvous of many waters—the Machno, the Llugwy, the Lledr—pouring into the Conway. Fairy glens and waterfalls abound down below in those dense

woods, and on still summer days, when the winds are hushed, one may hear the voices of those confluent streams and falls, mingled in a hoarse whisper. The pilgrim, strange to this road, adventuring afoot or awheel from these commanding heights onward and downwards to Bettws, is presently possessed with a curiosity to know how much further the descent goes.

THE WATERLOO BRIDGE.

Downward and still down, meeting cyclists, carriages, and waggonettes crawling up, he goes and, passing another toll-house, comes at last to the valley, beside the Conway again. Here, where the road turns with a singular abruptness to the left, Telford has spanned that stream with the Waterloo Bridge, a single cast-iron arch, beautiful in itself, and, decorated with

emblematic and symbolic representations of the Rose, Thistle, Shamrock, and Leek—the floral and vegetable badges of our composite kingdoms and principalities — proving that Telford had something of the artistic sense, as well as engineering genius. Cast-iron lettering, pierced and easily to be read, follows the course of the arch and explains why "Waterloo" Bridge was so named. "This arch," it says, "was constructed in the same year the battle of Waterloo was fought." The names of Telford, of the ironfounder, and of the foreman of works, are all recorded in cast iron.

XLII

Across the bridge and we are in Bettws-y-Coed: "Bettws in the Wood." Exactly how that name fits the situation of the place is instantly seen. It occupies the floor of a tiny valley hemmed in by great hills covered with trees, chiefly dwarf oaks. Through this valley runs the Conway, joined in its midst by the Llugwy. Close by this confluence still remains the old church, the "Bettws" that preceded the village itself, and whence the village obtains its name. Bettws is the Cymric corruption of the Anglo-Saxon bêd-hûs, or "house of prayer"; signifying a minor chapelry; and the ancient and quite humble building fully bears out that character.

When a branch railway was made to Bettws from Llandudno some twenty years ago, the station was built beside the old church, robbing it of not a little of that quiet seclusion which belongs to the spot chosen by David Cox as the scene of his "Welsh Funeral." Since then the primitive little place that served the simple needs of many generations of Welsh folk has been found neither good enough nor large enough

THE OLD CHURCH, BETTWS-Y-COED.

for the fine flower of civilisation that now makes holiday at Bettws. Just as the long, long row of hotels and lodging-houses has replaced the original whitewashed granite cottages of the village, so a quite new, quite magnificent, and absolutely cathedral-like church in the Transitional-Norman style has been erected to serve the needs of the modern resort. It is an altogether admirable building, too, and could

contain, perhaps, ten or twelve churches of the size of the old one: but ——!

The old church remains, but little used. One enters the churchyard over a rugged stile of granite, and passing through a grave of yews of a peculiarly sombre shade—the yews that Cox painted—comes upon the neglected building with reverence. Across the way, the railway trucks are slamming and banging in the goods-yard, and the shunters swearing in Welsh; in the "Royal Oak" and the other hotels the visitors are feeding as they would in London; on the road the waggonettes are plying with their loads to the Fairy Glen or the Swallow Waterfall: only in this little churchyard is there complete solitude.

The building is plain to barrenness within, and is more like some secular room than a church. The sole monument, or inscription, of any period, is the stone effigy of Grufyd ap Davyd Gôch, with his nose duly knocked off; his hands in prayer:—

> For past omissions to atone
> By saying endless prayers in stone.

XLIII

THE fame of Bettws was made by David Cox, that unassuming landscape painter who, appreciated inadequately in his lifetime, now keeps

company with the Old Masters in the estimation of the discerning, and in the prices his works command at public auction. David Cox well knew the Holyhead Road: few so well, and perhaps none better. He was born beside it, in a cottage at Heath Mill Lane, Deritend, in 1783, and his favourite sketching grounds in North Wales lay along, or within sight of, the old highway. When he came to Bettws—when he, in the artistic sense, "discovered" it—the village was not a tenth part of the size it is now. No one ever thought of staying here in those days, and had travellers by any chance been compelled to halt at either of the two primitive inns, the "Royal Oak" or the "Waterloo," the plainest country fare and the homeliest accommodation would have been theirs. No baronial dining-rooms, no odious German waiters whom one longs to wipe one's feet upon, no wine lists then: just a simple choice between the parlour or the rustic kitchen; between *cwrw da* (that is to say, good ale), and bread and cheese and eggs and bacon served by a Welsh lass, who probably understood not a word of English, but possessed cheeks like a rose, a waist some thirty inches round, and great flat feet—very trying to amateur poets given to rhyming about gazelles, Hebes, and tripping Phyllises.

To the then tiny whitewashed inn, the "Royal Oak," came David Cox during a long series of years, almost, indeed, until 1859, the year of his

death. It must not be supposed that Cox was a neglected or unsuccessful genius. It is true that his greatness has only been realised to the full since his death, but he was prosperous throughout almost the whole of his career, and the legends that tell how he painted the sign of the "Royal Oak" in order to pay his score are absolutely without foundation. At no time after his youthful days was Cox poor, and he never possessed those Bohemian habits that left many a successful but dissolute artist of those times stranded for lack of money.

Cox himself has told how he came to paint the sign. It was done in 1847, at a time when his art and his reputation were ripe. The old painted board, fixed against the wall of the house, had become faded with long exposure to the weather, and he volunteered to repaint it for his old friend the landlady. The long street of Bettws was infinitely quieter in 1847 than now. The houses were few and scattered, the railway had done away with the coaches, and tourists were uncommon, so that he not unreasonably expected to do the work without interruption. He had ascended a short ladder, and was working away with palette on thumb, and heaps of pigments and the largest brushes he could lay hands on, when it suddenly occurred to him that he was not in a very dignified position for a man of his standing; and that, should he be seen by any one passing through Bettws, a very ridiculous story might be put into circulation,

not at all to his advantage. However, he summoned up courage, and comforted himself with the reflection that he would not be observed, or, if seen, would be taken for a common house-painter. But, when in the midst of his work, to his horror he heard a carriage approaching. "Now," he thought, "I'm done for! Perhaps, though, it will pass by." But, instead of passing,

SIGN OF THE "ROYAL OAK."

it halted beneath, a pretty face looked up at him from it, and a voice exclaimed: "Why, it *is* Mr. Cox, I declare!" The lady was a former pupil of his who, recently married, was travelling in Wales on her honeymoon. "That is not the ladder of Fame you are on now," she said.

Poor Cox was horrified. If he explained the why and the how of his work that day, it evidently did not make the impression of sincerity,

for the stories of his painting the sign to wipe off a debt obviously derive from this chance meeting.

Two years later the painter retouched his work. In 1861, two years after his death, it was, at the request of many admirers, removed from the outside and placed in the hall of the house, then become a "hotel," and beginning that series of rebuildings and extensions that have made it what it is to-day. In 1880 the then landlady became bankrupt, and the trustees of the estate claimed the old sign as a valuable asset, stating that a connoisseur had offered £1,000 for it, a statement that moved the late Cuthbert Bede to scandalised incredulity. It, however, would certainly bring bids of more than double that amount if put up to auction to-day.

The claim of the trustees was disputed by the freeholder, the Baroness Willoughby De Eresby, and the matter was decided in her favour, with costs. The famous sign was judged to be a fixture, and may yet be seen in the hall of the hotel, handsomely enshrined behind glass in a decorative overmantel.

It is a fine, bold piece of work, virile in its dashing brushmarks and impasto, and in a pleasing low key of colour; altogether very Old Masterish. An inscription beneath states that it "forms part of the freehold of the Hotel belonging to the Baroness Howard de Walden." It now belongs to the Earl of Ancaster. Let those

who will, and have the curiosity to it, trace the why and the wherefore of this devolution of property and titles from a De Eresby, through a Howard de Walden, to an Ancaster.

XLIV

If there were not so many dishonest people, and so many vulgar people, in the world, the visitors-books of the "Royal Oak" would be a delight to present-day travellers. Those books begin in 1855, and have in their time been filled with a very miscellaneous collection of autographs, criticisms, and sketches. In the old days, before the house was rebuilt, and its new magnificence and crowds of vulgar and artless rich frightened away the majority of artists, thoughtless fellows who had not "arrived" endowed these books with many signed sketches which in after years, when they had achieved reputations, became valuable in a commercial sense. Pencil sketches there were, pen-drawings, and water-colours; and autographs of other men since known to fame were scattered plentifully through those pages. Among and between them were many of the silly, offensive, and downright infamous things that one finds in every visitors-book; for the Howling Cad is a large and plentiful leaven. The productions of the Cad

are there still, and later generations of cads and thieves have added their own sillinesses with one hand, while with the other they have cut out the things that really interested. As, according to Tennyson, "the lie that is half a lie is ever the blackest of lies," so the Cad that has got sufficient culture to appreciate the worth of a thing, and then steals it, must be the caddiest of cads. It is as demonstrable a thing as a theorem in Euclid.

The visitors-books of the "Royal Oak" are therefore things of tatters and fragments, but in these remains the spirit of old-time touring may here and there be found. They walked mostly, those tourists, and sketches of them in peg-top trousers—very baggy in the upper part of the leg, tight at the foot, and very braidy at the seams—show how they roamed the country. Often they wore "Jemimas"—the brutes!

It is quite certain that the tourist who in these times should tour in that quaint guise would be mobbed, for, in addition to his weird nether garments, the gay young man of 1860 or thereabouts wore a felt hat like a pudding basin, with a flat brim and a button on the crown. Complete the picture with an eyeglass and a pair of "Piccadilly weepers," and there you are. Yet they were consummate lady-killers, or so imagined themselves to be, and a reflection of their deathly oglings is found in these pages. "Look out for the girl in the village, just beyond the gate—such a stunner!"

says one. ("Stunner" was a word characteristic of the sixties.) It is quite evident that those who followed took this amatory pilgrim's advice, for "Not equal to our Mary Ann, though," is appended by some disappointed swain.

Girl, gate, and pilgrims, where are they, and where is the Bettws of that era? Gone, my friends, and only the immemorial hills and these ragged visitors-books remain. For Bettws has been entirely rebuilt since then, and the "gate" referred to was brutally swept away some ten years since. Brutally, because it was an ivy and creeper-clad old toll-house, one of the charmingest landmarks in the place. It stood at the corner leading to Pont-y-Pair, where a boarding-house called "Carleton House" may now be seen.

But to return to our visitors-books. The verses found in them would scarce grace a poetic garland, but here is a sample, *circa* 1860:—

Good reader, supposing you've looked through this book,
Some fair verses no doubt you have read;
Some good sketches, with bad ones—the latter but few;
But did soliloquy enter your head?

How many are left who their names have inscribed
In a mood both happy and free?
How many in Britain, how many abroad?
Some sleep 'neath the old willow tree.

A later scribbler appropriately asks this poet to "Cheer up!" He is followed by one who

rhymes "spruce" with "Bettws," which is a very close approximation to the correct pronunciation. Then comes the "Marquis of Alicampane," and later a critic who implores some heterographical guest, "*Do* cultivate a taste for spelling." Then comes a shapeless scribble, signed and priced by some wag, "J. M. W. Turner, £450."

The fate that follows distinguished visitors who gravely and pompously enter their names is seen in the comments on the entry, "Sir William Barlow, K.C.B., and Lady Barlow." There was at that period a popular song called "Billy Barlow," and with the hint thus afforded some idle artist has drawn in the margin his ideas of Sir William and his lady. They are not flattering.

David Cox did not live to see his beloved Bettws overrun by artists and excursionists and exploited to the n^{th} degree. It remained unspotted from the world. To those who only know the Bettws of to-day, and see the railway station and the hundreds of excursionists that pour out of it on every summer afternoon, it is incredible that a visitor who, like some exploring Columbus, or Livingstone, at the least of it, stumbled upon the place in 1855, at the close of the great struggle in the Crimea, should have found the villagers quite ignorant of there having been any war. To-day things are very different. Hotels, boarding-houses, lodging-houses, and cyclists' rests, with a sprinkling of shops

where photographs and guide-books are sold, occupy the whole street; and when lunch-time and the dinner-hour are come, the scent of other people's meals wafted down the road is quite oppressive.

But let it not be thought that Bettws is spoilt. It is only changed. If no longer unsophisticated, it is yet delightful, and if the houses are all new, they are at least either in good taste, or, at the worst, inoffensive. And, after all, the glorious scenery remains. The artists, however, are gone to Trefriw, a village down the Conway, as yet untamed and unbroken to the harness of convention. Time was when one could not stir out of doors at Bettws without upsetting an easel. Passing a wall, you would be startled by a fellow with long hair and velvet jacket, and with a portfolio under his arm, jumping over it; looking down a lane, many easels would be seen there; a glance at the rocks of Pont-y-Pair would reveal sketch-books and pencils busily at work; and wandering, hand in hand with your Aminta in the shady byeways, you would not find the seclusion that such romantic occasions demand.

Other times, other manners. The amateur photographer is now in possession of Bettws. That central spot, the very hub of the place, the bridge over the Llugwy—called Pont-y-Pair, or the "Bridge of the Cauldron," in allusion to the seething water falling over the rocks—is the favoured shooting-ground, and all day long

the excursionists who bask picturesquely on the sunny stones are the victims of snapshotters, or

PONT-Y-PAIR.

with their own cameras pick off the sharpshooters on the bridge. Under such a terrific cross-fire as this few can hope to escape.

XLV

The two miles leading from Bettws along the Holyhead Road to Rhaiadr-y-Wennol, or the "Swallow Falls," conduct upwards, out of the hole in whose kindly shelter Bettws lies. Along this somewhat tiring incline a long procession of sight-seers may be seen toiling every day, from April to October, at any time between eight a.m. and seven in the evening, for the Falls have always been considered one of the sights best worth seeing in Wales, and even the Holyhead Mail used to pull up for five minutes to allow passengers to see them. They obtain their pretty name only, it is sad to reflect, by error, in an old confusion of "Wennol," the Welsh word for "swallow," with "Ewynol," which means "foaming," and is therefore a description merely Saxon in its unimaginative matter-of-fact. To those who would compare the Swallow Falls with Niagara or Alpine waterfalls, with intent to disparage this beautiful spot, we need have nothing to say. Let it be sufficient that these foaming waters, overhung with rocks and fantastically-rooted trees, are sufficiently lovely. The Falls are so close to the road as to be readily seen from it, between the trunks of the little fir plantation that intervenes, while their roaring can be heard far away. They begin with a tumbled race of the Llugwy between scattered rocks, developing

THE SWALLOW FALLS. *From an Old Print.*

into three distinct steps or falls, followed by a long slide. These masses of water, flung riotously upon one another, produce a curiously beautiful effect on the river immediately below, the element being so thoroughly aerated that for many yards onward it is full of air-bubbles as brilliant as the sparklets in champagne or mineral waters. The Swallow Falls have, of course, their legend. Beneath them is supposed to lie the spirit of Sir John Wynn, of Gwydyr, a canny baronet of the early seventeenth century, who was so "shrewd and successful in his dealings" that his Welsh neighbours, rightly or wrongly, thought him enriched by foul means at their expense. Accordingly, here his unhappy shade was sent "to be punished, purged, spouted upon, and purified from the foul deeds done in his days of nature." According to latest advices, it is here yet, "demned moist, unpleasant." If all erring shades were banished to such situations, it is to be feared there would not be waterfalls sufficient to go round; but, indeed, it is to a roomier and a drier place that they are generally thought to be consigned.

The Llugwy, more and more a mountain stream as we proceed, borders the road, on one side or the other, as far as Capel Curig. Half a mile beyond the Swallow Falls, it is crossed at Ty-Hyll bridge, and is thenceforward on the left-hand. The road still ascends, crosses a wild tract with an ancient fir-crowned tumulus, and comes steeply up to Pont-y-Cyfyng and the Cyfyng Falls, a pretty

scene, among scrub oaks and silver birches, with one of Telford's happily placed little alcoves, for the amateurs of the picturesque, built out from the breastwork protecting the road.

Here the great road enters upon its wildest and most impressive stretches, but not without such compensations to the traveller as the pretty, artist-haunted inns of Tan-y-Bwlch afford. Another toll-gate—never, surely, was there a

CYFYNG FALLS.

great highway to vie with this in the number of them—blocked the way until the close of 1890, and the old house remains. Just beyond it, and full in view of the trim peaks of Snowdon, of Moel Siabod, and their great cloud-capped brethren, is the little village, or rather hamlet, of Capel Curig, lying in the valley where roads go off left to the stormy pass of Llanberis and so on to Carnarvon; and on the right to Holyhead.

Capel Curig was, like Bettws, never more than a chapelry in the wilds; but, unlike Bettws, it has not grown with modern times. One may seek the reason with success in the fact that no railway comes near it. A contributory reason is perhaps found in the nature of its surroundings. Grandeur of scenery, and purity of air do not compensate holiday-folks for the mists, the furious storms, and the frequent rains that haunt the spot. Visitors to Capel Curig have been known to drive into it through the rain, to stay as indoor prisoners to stress of weather for a week; departing without ever once having seen the mists disperse that cling so fondly about Snowdon, and veil his majesty from many eyes.

A thunderstorm here is a terrific and appalling thing, with the encircling mountains acting as sounding-boards to the demoniacal peals of thunder that crash with ear-rending reverberations along the valleys. Fortunately for those who are unwilling witnesses of this elemental strife, Capel Curig possesses a very large and resourceful hotel, standing off the Holyhead Road, by the twin lakes in the valley. It was built about 1802 by the then Lord Penrhyn, one of the first to urge the improvement of the Holyhead Road and the adoption of this route, instead of the older and more circuitous one by Chester. He probably could not, with the best will in the world, have erected a plainer building.

When Borrow, tramping eighteen miles on a hot and dusty day, came here, he found the

fashionable company in the grand saloon surveying him with looks of the most supercilious disdain. They thought him some poor fellow, tramping from motives of economy.

The poor little whitewashed church of Capel Curig—the original Chapel of St. Curig that gives the place its name—stands quite near the big hotel. It was dedicated to Curig and to Julitta, his mother. The missionary zeal that impelled

CAPEL CURIG.

them to come here, a thousand years or so ago, must have been at fever heat, for this was then a place of unutterable loneliness: not as now with a fine road running by, but a trackless country, deeply shadowed by the almost impenetrable oak woods that covered the mountain sides and the moorlands, now almost entirely innocent of trees of any sort. A mild specimen of what even eighteenth century roads were like will give some notion of the difficulties of approach that

remained until 1820. This "awful example" is the four-mile length of deserted road between Capel Curig and Llyn Ogwen. It was once the only way, and the modern Holyhead Road between these two points is wholly of Telford's making. The beginning of this track—for it was little better—may be sought between the Post Office and the whitewashed cottage that was once the "Tap" of the hotel down yonder. Passing immediately over a rugged bridge spanning a waterfall on the Llugwy, it mounts across the rising moorland, and climbs a boulder-strewn ridge; to descend to the shores of Ogwen under the beetling crags of Trifaen mountain. There is sufficient evidence that it is little less than the bed of a mountain torrent in winter-time, and even to pedestrians the exploration of it is difficult.

XLVI

Telford's road takes an infinitely better course, although, to be sure, the four miles onward to Lake Ogwen are on a steady and uninterrupted rise, almost impossible to face with a steady head-wind, and wholly so when storms scour through the pass. Here is the summit-level of the road, 957 feet above the sea, with mountains 3,000 feet higher surrounding the

lonely moorland. Infrequent farmsteads of the smallest and most cabin-like kind are scattered about the almost barren space, among the bogs and the tremendous boulders that have at some time or other come hurtling down from the mountain-sides, where there remain many more of the same sort, ready to descend. Peat-stacks to every farm tell of what fuel they use here, just as the great stones placed on the roofs of stacks and cabins alike hint of the fury of the winds.

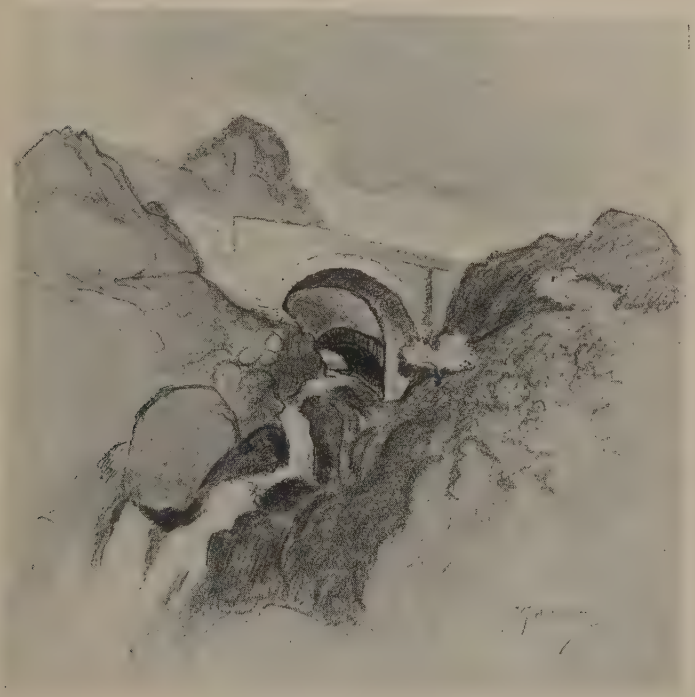
Llyn Ogwen comes at the end of this moor, where the mountains close in and narrow the passage. It borders the road for a mile; a shuddery lake of ice-cold water, sombre and austere as Trifaen the three-headed himself, or Braich Du and Carnedd Dafydd on the opposite shores; all of them mountains of the most craggy and stupendous sort.

Trifaen, an abrupt mountain of 3010 feet, is incomparably the finest in Wales, after Snowdon. Its three peaks, with tattered shreds of mists clinging about them, seem to hang immediately overhead, and the huge fissures up its mighty sides, with moisture sparkling here and there on the slaty rocks, like jewels in the sunshine, forbid all but the most determined climbers.

The anglers who fish for trout in Ogwen, the cyclists, and the brake-parties from Bangor, all help to make the little refreshment house that was once a toll-house, a busy enough place.

LLYN OGWEN AND TRIFAEN MOUNTAIN.

It stands where the overflow from the Llyn dashes down more than a hundred feet, in a series of cascades, into a deep valley. These are the Falls of Ogwen, and the valley that opens out below and stretches for miles onward,



THE FALLS OF OGWEN.

with a glimpse of the sea in the distance, is the far famed Nant Ffrancon — "the Glen of Beavers." Until Telford reconstructed the road from this point, the way — "the most dreadful horse-path in Wales" as Pennant describes it in 1759—led over the Falls by an

extremely narrow bridge without parapets, and descended in break-neck fashion into the other side of the valley. Telford wholly abandoned that suicidal drop and set his workmen to quarry and blast out a gradual three miles' descent on the hither side, along the shoulders of the hills: a gradient so gentle that, although the road is situated in the midst of the most

NANT FFRANCON. *After David Cox.*

rugged scenery, it never exceeds 1 in 22. He built a new bridge over the Falls, and propped up his road from falling into the valley by a massive length of retaining-wall; carrying underneath the carriage-way by cross drains, the little spouts of water that fall at every few yards from the mountain sides.

The old bridge may still be seen, a moss-grown and decrepit arch, beside the modern,

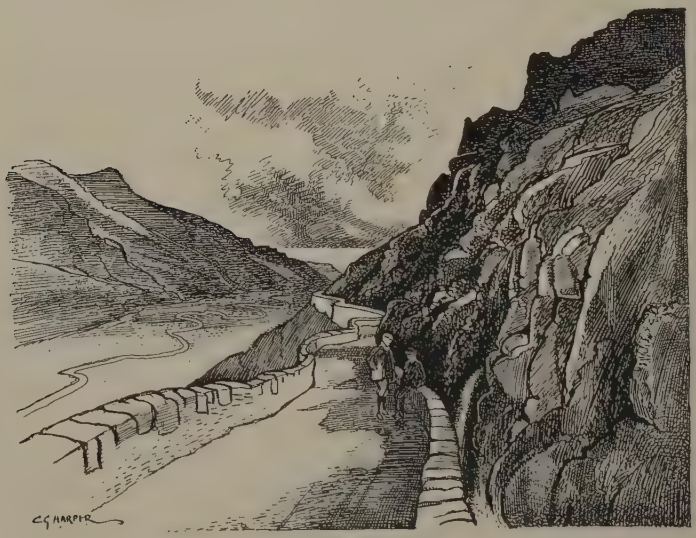
and the old road still descends the vale; but no one save the peasants and the wandering shepherds ever trace the deserted way. David Cox has left a fine view of the modern road, with Carnedd Dafydd and Trifaen in the background, and the scenery to the right, where the black and frightful precipice called the "Devil's Kitchen" gapes; vapours overhanging it like the steam of some infernal cookery.

XLVII

The Glen of Beavers is a beautiful spot from the standpoint of the tourist, if not of the farmers, who have with infinite labour collected the scattered boulders, and built boundary walls with them; and essay to grow corn and hay in the bottom, where the Ogwen stream goes prattling in summer on its winding course. The Ogwen is no friend to the farmer, for walls and stacks and earth are often carried away in winter by the innocent looking brook, that arises at such times and, clearing the fields far and wide in an irresistible flood, deposits stones where the good earth had been, and carries the earth itself in solution down to Bangor, and so out to sea. Before agriculture can feel secure here, locks and dams should regulate the tricksy watercourse, just as was done by the dams the

beavers built in the unrecorded ages, before ever the farmer came.

At the foot of the descent is Tyn-y-Maes—the House in the Meadow, a hamlet where an inn stood in coaching days to supply relays for the last stage into Bangor, and where, one may be quite sure, the coachmen and passengers coming down or going up, partook of those



NANT FFRANCON.

creature comforts the rigours of the journey demanded. A coachman was said to have lost his eyesight from the effects of a snowstorm at Nant Ffrancon.

It is a woeful exchange from the quiet streams and the rural sights of the last few miles to Bethesda and the hideous slate quarries that gash the hillsides. "A Scriptural name,"

said Borrow, when a chance acquaintance on the road told him the name of the village.

"Is it?" said he; "well, if its name is Scriptural, the manners of its people are by no means so."

If the appearance of Bethesda (now a town, and a very mean and ugly one) were any criterion of the character of its inhabitants, then, the Bethesda people would be past praying for. It is a long, long street of the most furiously ugly houses that ever roof was put to, and the whole of its surroundings are pitifully sordid. Whether cheap stucco or slate be the building materials, the result is the same, and the generations of quarrymen who have laboured to enrich Lord Penrhyn and his ancestors are doomed to dwell in a most squalid place, within sight of some of the most beautiful scenery in the world.

For Lord Penrhyn is the owner of land far and near. Not, for the most part, land that would enrich its possessor, but in the slate quarries of Bethesda a veritable mine of wealth, far surpassing the riches derived from many a goldfield. Slate rock that can be quarried and split into the thin sections required for roofing is of the rarest occurrence, and most of it is situated within the bounds of the Penhryn estates, that for centuries have produced more than three-quarters of the slates coming into the market. Not only the home market is supplied from here, but foreign also. Unlike the working

of most mineral estates, the quarries are not let out to some middleman, but worked direct for Lord Penrhyn, and have been notorious from time to time for the bitter and long-drawn strikes that have taken place. The middleman is not generally regarded with favour, but it is safe to say, without following the wretched story of the Bethesda quarrymen, that if such an one had the control of the quarries, such occurrences, although possible, would not have been of so protracted a character. A man who should lease the quarries could not afford to lock them up, and, putting the key in his pocket, let the strike go on for ever, or until the workmen and their families were starved into accepting terms; but the Lords Penrhyn can. The Penrhyns have been so greatly enriched by the quarries that their wealth is colossal, and current income from that source can be cut off without any discomfort. The whole pitiful business would be impossible under that enlightened statesmanship which some day will make all mineral wealth public property.

The chief features of the Bethesda scenery are the long series of rubbish-heaps, or rubbish-mountains, and the terraced clefts in the hills whence the slates have come. Whole hillsides have been cut and blasted away, to be fashioned into slates that have roofed half the little suburban villas of the world. The great success of Welsh slates is due to their cheapness, and to the thinness to which it is possible to split them. so that the cheap builder of cheap houses need

not provide a very substantial roof to bear their weight. It is very different with the Cumberland slates; smaller and thicker and a great deal more expensive, they are only to be found on buildings where cheapness has not been the first object. Between the Welsh and the Cumbrian products there can only be one choice on the score of appearance and strength. Welsh slates

PENRHYN CASTLE.

have a disagreeable colour, something between a blackish-blue and dark purple: those from Cumberland are a delicate grey-green, beautiful when new, and improving with age. Their comparative thickness, too, is an advantage from many points of view.

The gates of Penrhyn Park confront the traveller when he has at last left Bethesda in his wake. They are appropriately feudal and

threatening, in a revival of the old castellated style, just as though the owner of the quarries had shut himself within, and was prepared to defend himself and his hoards to the last extremity against the starving thousands of the quarry-town. The little village of Llandegai stands near, and beyond stretches the Park, with Penrhyn Castle in its midst: a lovely scene of dense woodlands falling towards a blue expanse

LONISAF TOLL-HOUSE.

of sea, with an island and a lighthouse and white-winged yachts. The Castle turrets dominate the whole, an elaborate and highly successful piece of make-believe, compelling the reverence of the wayfarer, until he draws near and discovers that the Norman keep, own brother in appearance to that of Rochester Castle, was built about a hundred years ago by a certain "judicious Hopper" (not our old theological

friend, the judicious Hooker), " who with his usual taste and science has preserved in his improvements the characteristic style of the military Gothic."

Positively the last toll-house before Bangor is found at Lonisaf, standing not far from the spot where the old road from Ogwen Falls joins the modern. Some toll-gates were provided with weighbridges, and Lonisaf was one of them, the little weigh-house still remaining. The especial function of these weighbridges was to detect overloading. Fines for carts and waggons laden beyond their proper weight were very heavy, and their severity and frequent application fully reimbursed the trustees the cost of installing a check of this kind.

XLVIII

The road makes an abrupt turn to the left to enter the city of Bangor. The grim stone walls on either side of the forbidding edifice in front do not represent a prison, workhouse, or lunatic asylum, but have at present the honour of housing the University College of North Wales, founded in 1884. Years before that date this was the " Penrhyn Arms " hotel, one of the largest and best on the road, with great

resources in the way of reception-rooms, extensive private suites for the considerable personages who travelled to and from Ireland, and stabling for over a hundred horses. A private inclined road leads up to the pillared doorway, and an arch over the public road conducted in those days to the hotel farm and dairy. It is frequently found to be too low to permit the

THE PENRHYN ARMS.

passage of hay and straw waggons and other mountainous loads, with the result that the so-called "private" road is used, and is almost as public as the other. The best side of the building is turned away from the road, and looks from amid wide lawns and beautiful gardens across the Menai Straits to Beaumaris. Here they show with reverence the stump of a fir tree planted by the Princess

Victoria in 1832. The tree died in 1899. The interior of the house is, of course, divided into class-rooms, lecture-rooms, and the like. The kitchen and scullery are now a library, and students now swat where fat cooks once sweated before roasting fires. The change is one that would have horrified Colonel Birch-Reynardson, equally with the coachmen and guards of the Holyhead Mail that used to change here in the palmy days of Host Bicknell.

The Colonel, as an amateur whip, often drove the Mail between Oswestry and Bangor, and tells how others occasionally did the same. There was, for example, one who took a glass or a bottle too much at the "Owen Glendower" at Corwen, and wrought havoc with the mail and other things along the road, with the result that the bags were too late for the packet at Holyhead, and the Post Office authorities heard of it. Result number two was that horse proprietors were severely admonished not to allow any one but the authorised coachman to drive. They did so all the same, but the reins were prudently made to change hands when nearing "the change." Charlie Harper, who about that time had been promoted from the slower Chester and Holyhead to the fast direct Holyhead Mail, had resigned his ribbons one day to the Colonel, but took them over on nearing Bangor. The Colonel, however, good-humouredly took Bicknell to task for giving *him* the sack. The hotel-keeper was sorry, but no amateur could drive

the Mail again after the wigging he had got from the Post Office.

Some little while later, one stormy evening, the Colonel was on the Mail at Bangor. Harper, at the end of his day's work, got down and went home; the new team was put to, and the Mail stood waiting for Jack Williams, the coachman who was to take it across the bridge and on to Holyhead. Five minutes passed; time was up, and no coachman appeared. "What the devil are you waiting for?" asked Hodgson, the guard, coming back from the Post Office with the bags. "Where is Jack Williams?"

No one had seen Jack Williams, and no one seemed to know whether he was dead or alive. At last one of the horsekeepers seemed to remember all of a sudden that Williams had been summoned to attend a magistrates' meeting on the other side of the Menai Bridge; that Harper was to have taken the Mail over the bridge, and Williams to get up at the public-house where the worthy beaks who had summoned him were to hold their conclave. "Yess, inteet, I remember it wass summoned to attend the magistrates' meeting" (*it* standing, of course, for 'Chack' Williams).

"Now then," said Hodgson, growing impatient, "we can't wait here all day; somebody must drive. Mr. Reynardson, will you be so good? We shall be late for the packet."

"I don't care," said the Colonel, "whether you are late or not; I am thankful to say I am

not going to cross such a day as this. Jump up and drive yourself, and I'll take charge of your bags. Bicknell has said that I am not to drive his horses, and if you take root here I don't care; I'll not touch them." "Well, sir, we shall be late for the packet if you *won't*," said Hodgson. "I don't care," he replied, "I dare say I shall be able to get to where I am going in time for dinner, or at all events before bed-time, so I'll have nothing to do with either the mail or Mr. Bicknell's horses, and if the mail stays here all night it's nothing to me." "Now, Hodgson," said Bicknell, who just then appeared at the door, "what's the Mail standing there for." "That's *just* what I should like to know," answered Hodgson; "but the Mail can't go, sir, without some one to drive it. Jack Williams is not to be found, Charlie Harper has gone home long ago, and Mr. Reynardson says you said he was not to drive your horses any more, and he won't have anything to do with them; so what's to be done I don't know. We shall be late for the packet, and then you know there'll be a row again with the Post Office people."

Things seemed to be in something of a fix, and Hodgson, though in a fuss to be off, was rather enjoying the joke, which began to be a serious one; for there seemed to be no chance of any one to drive. It was blowing great guns, and the Menai Bridge would be rocking about like a cradle, and the team of greys were not

the handiest in the world, if they had not got up the right way in the morning, and if things went a little wrong.

"Well," said Bicknell, "this won't do. Will you drive them, Mr. Reynardson, till you find Jack Williams on the other side of the bridge?" "No," said the obstinate Colonel, "you may drive them yourself, if you like; I won't touch them." Things looked bad; Bicknell was no coachman; Hodgson said he could not, and Reynardson that he would not, drive, and there seemed none of the horsekeepers competent to perform the feat. So at last, Mr. Bicknell, putting on his most affable face, said: "Mr. Reynardson, Sir, will you be so kind as to take them across the bridge? I shall be very much obliged to you if you will." "Oh! Oh!" said the pacified amateur, "if you are going to be obliged, or anything of that kind, I don't mind obliging you, Mr. Bicknell," and the thing was done.

XLIX

Bangor is a forbidding place—a squalid and uninteresting mile-length of street, extending from this spot to the railway station, where a more recent and less objectionable continuation of it, called Upper Bangor, climbs for another

half-mile towards the Menai Bridge. The long, long street of Bangor, narrow and dirty, gives an indescribably second-hand appearance to everything exposed for sale in its shop-windows; and the stranger, newly arrived from the champagne-like air of Capel Curig, has not been in Bangor half an hour before he, too, feels second-hand and soiled. He goes weak at the knees, totters, and feels utterly undone. The town lies as it were in the bottom of a funnel, and, tucked away from actual contact with the vivifying breezes of the Menai Strait, has air neither from one side nor the other. It is, by consequence, a town of the sickliest. Let these things, however, be said rather in sorrow than contempt, for of contempt Bangor has already had sufficient at the hands of generations of travellers. Many are attracted to Bangor by reason of its cathedral, but it were better the building had not that proud title, because those who have already made acquaintance with the famous cathedrals of England see a lack of proportion in thus dignifying a church that, for both size and beauty, is surpassed times without number by parish churches in the shires. For its present want of interest, such individually remote and entirely dissimilar persons as Owain Glyndwr and Sir Gilbert Scott are responsible. Owain in 1402 laid it in ruins; and Scott, who, at a cost of £35,000, was engaged from 1866 to 1875 in "restoring" the debased Perpendicular building he found here, has impressed his own

architectural nostrums upon it in a very disastrous manner. It is a long, low structure, with a dwarf central tower, and its own inherent disadvantages are greatly worsened by its site being in a hollow beside the shabby street.

Doctor Johnson, who, touring North Wales in 1774, found the "quire" of Bangor to be "mean," could quite honestly repeat that criticism to-day. The service in his time was also "ill-read." A "very mean inn" in the town further helped to jaundice his views—an inn with little accommodation, for he records: "I lay in a room where the other bed had two men."

De Quincey is one of the very many who have not liked Bangor. He says it has "fewer attractions than any other spot in Carnarvonshire"—a very mild and negative way of putting Bangor's disabilities, and much milder than it might have been, considering the provocation received. It was in 1802 he was here, following his "elopement" from school at Manchester. With the weekly allowance of a guinea, he was free for a while to roam Wales as he pleased, and came (of all places!) to Bangor, where he hired "a very miniature set of apartments—one room and a closet." His landlady had been a servant in the household of the Bishop of Bangor, and, one day, calling at the Palace, happened to mention to the Right Reverend how she had let her rooms. Thereupon that dignified cleric thought it incumbent upon him to caution her as to her selection of

inmates. "You must recollect, Betty," he said, "that Bangor is the high road to the Head (*the Head* was the common colloquial expression for Holyhead); so that multitudes of Irish swindlers, running away from their debts into England; and of English swindlers, running away from their debts to the Isle of Man, are likely to take this place in their route."

This was excellent advice for judicious ears; but Betty unhappily repeated the Bishop's words to De Quincey, together with her reply, which was, "Oh, my lord, I really don't think this young gentleman is a swindler, because——" But the clause that was to have justified him that young gentleman never knew. "You don't *think* me a swindler," he interposed; "I shall spare you the trouble of thinking about it"; and so departed, in a righteous fury.

L

It is at Bangor that the old Chester route to Holyhead, by way of Penmaenmawr, falls into the great Holyhead Road. Although we have not come by Chester, it may be worth while to glance at Penmaenmawr, that gigantic headland over whose perilous heights old-time travellers went, trembling for their safety. Its Welsh name, meaning literally the "great stone

head," sufficiently describes this old obstacle and stumbling-block, looking over the water to Anglesey. Nowadays the railway tunnels through it, and travellers by the Wild Irishman, warned by the locomotive's shriek, are plunged into a momentary darkness, fifteen hundred feet beneath the windy height where the horsemen of two hundred years ago stumbled along an indistinct track. Swift was of that company, and it is still told how the inns at either end of this laborious route used to display on their signs the couplets written by him :—

> Before you venture here to pass,
> Take a good refreshing glass.

And—

> Now this hill you're safely over,
> Drink, your spirits to recover.

By 1774, when Dr. Johnson toured in Wales, matters had somewhat improved. "We came to Penmaenmawr," he says, "by daylight, and found a way, lately made very easy and very safe. It was cut smooth and enclosed between parallel walls, the outer of which secures the passenger from the precipice, which is deep and dreadful. This wall is here and there broken by mischievous wantonness. The inner wall preserves the road from the loose slates, which the shattered steep above it would pour down. That side of the mountain seems to have a surface of loose stones which every accident may crumble. The old road runs higher, and

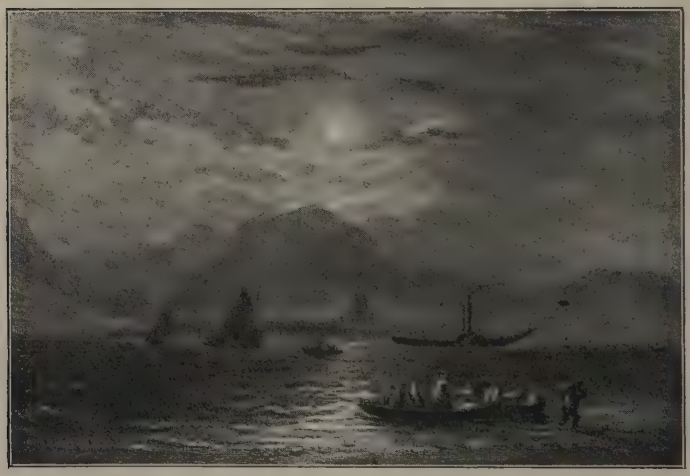
PENMAENMAWR. *After J. M. W. Turner, R.A.*

must have been very formidable. *The sea beats at the bottom of the way.*"

Those italics are not due to Johnson, but are placed here to duly emphasise the romantic note struck, perhaps unconsciously, by him at the close of those too-staccato sentences, studded all too plentifully with that often necessary but harsh word "which." "The sea beats at the bottom of the way:" there you have a picture of the place that hints in a sentence all manner of disasters; ships blown against the rocky coast, coaches swept off the road into the waves, and obscure catastrophes, the more dreadful because left to the imagination.

But not every one found Penmaenmawr so safe, even though the new road had replaced the old. They had not Johnson's robust nature, or else desired to make some literary capital out of the scene. Thus, more than twenty years later, the Rev. Richard Warner describes "the rocky mountain of Penmaenmawr," in what he evidently intends to be blood-curdling terms. "Formerly extremely rude and dangerous," he says, "it has been entirely altered and divested of a considerable degree of its horror. Still, however, it cannot be travelled without shuddering. Creeping round the side of the mountain, it hangs, as it were, in mid-air, with a frowning precipice above and a steep descent immediately under it. The rocks on the right are nearly perpendicular, sometimes beetling over the road in a terrific manner, at others retiring into deep

declivities of nine hundred or a thousand feet, from whose rugged sides project fragments of incalculable magnitude, so capriciously placed, and having such a disjoined appearance that it is impossible for the traveller to lose the perpetual dread of his being every moment crushed to atoms under a torrent of huge stones." That such stormy torrents *did* sometimes flow is



PENRHYN CASTLE AND SNOWDONIA, FROM BEAUMARIS.
After David Cox.

evident from Wigstead, who, coming to "where Penmaenmawr awfully raises its aspiring head," found a mass of rock recently fallen into the road in a storm; a huge fragment of cliff that, if broken up, could not have been cleared away by ten large waggons.

When the union of Great Britain and Ireland was effected, the Irish members clamoured for

the immediate improvement of this dangerous road. Indeed, the city of Dublin had already contributed something towards such a work, but the present fine highway round the base of the headland did not come into existence until Telford came upon the scene, blasting and levelling the way that Turner has pictured so well.

Having passed Penmaenmawr, the old travellers to Holyhead often crossed into Anglesey by the Lavan Sands to Beaumaris : a dangerous passage only to be attempted by those correctly informed of the tides. Horsemen would ride the three-mile stretch of sands exposed at low water, and, hailing the Beaumaris ferry, be readily landed on the island ; but if they by any chance ventured out half an hour too late, the rising tide swept them away, or the treacherous sands engulfed them. It was here that Sir John Bramston and his son were nearly lost in 1641. They had ridden across the sands to the verge of the channel and hailed the ferry ; but the ferrymen were drunk, and it was long before any notice was taken of them. Meanwhile, the tide was rising fast, and was swirling about them before aid arrived, and they were rescued in the nick of time.

LI

The ferries into Anglesey, five in all, from end to end of the Straits, were all more or less perilous. Crossing by them, according to evidence produced at an enquiry on the subject, 180 persons lost their lives between 1664 and 1842. The mail route was by Bangor Ferry, called by the Welsh Porthaethwy, or the "Ferry of the Narrow Waters," close by where Telford's suspension bridge now spans the channel. Up out of Bangor drove the Mails, and many of the stage-coaches, post-chaises, and chariots, to the ferry-house. Thence passengers and their luggage were ferried across to the opposite side in boats and lighters, each manned by four ferrymen. Coaches and chaises were in waiting when they landed, to whisk them off to Mona and Holyhead. Swift crossed here in 1727, and refers to the inn, "which, if it be well kept, will break Bangor." There he lay the night, and was up at four o'clock the next morning. This inn was the "George," still standing, with an addition built on, in what was intended to be a grand and imposing style, about 1850. The huge, buff-coloured pile, standing in midst of lovely gardens, faces the Strait. There still hangs on the wall of the coffee-room an autograph of the Duke of Wellington, taken from the visitors-book and proudly framed: "I passed the night of the 21st August, 1851, at the

George Inn, and was very well accommodated. Wellington."

In the terraced gardens is preserved the ferrymen's horn, but the ferrymen are dead and gone, and even their huts, built on the rocks of the Anglesey shore, are in ruins. There stands on that rocky landing-place an old inn, now called the "Cambria," but in the days of the ferry known as the "Three Tuns." It is a romantic spot, romantic with all the pathos of a tale that is told. From the wrought-iron bracket of the inn, long without a sign, to the deserted and roofless huts and the slippery, seaweedy rocks, everything tells of a vanished order of things. A few ancients gossip of what their fathers and grandfathers told them of the times when exhausted passengers climbed from the slimy rocks at the water's edge to the shelter of the inn, and of the old custom of swimming the cattle across the Straits at low water, from the island of Ynys-y-Moch that now supports one of the bridge-towers; but even the bridge is now become something of an antiquity, and the ferry well-nigh forgot. A well-authenticated story of it is still remembered. It tells how an attorney, on the ground of having booked through to London, refused to pay the penny demanded by the ferrymen for taking his portmanteau across, and how it was accordingly detained until the Mail had left. The lawyer then paid the disputed penny and ordered out a chaise and four to London. Arrived there, he brought an

action against the proprietors of the Mail, and recovered all his expenses and compensation for loss of time. The Judge expressed his opinion that the plaintiff was a benefactor to his country, a view not likely to be taken in these times of one who would spend £50 and perhaps five times that amount in litigation rather than pay a penny.

The ferry was not superseded without some little contention. It had been the property, time out of mind, of the Williams family, of Plas Issa, Conway. Leased to an ancestral John Williams by Queen Elizabeth, for £3 6*s*. 8*d*. a year, there is no knowing how far back beyond that time the family interest had reached. Government offered a sum in compensation when the bridge was building, but the amount was not considered sufficient, and the question was referred to the Beaumaris Assizes, where the average takings of the last twelve years were stated to have been £885 18*s*. per annum. In the result, Miss Williams, the representative of the family, was awarded £26,557, representing thirty years' purchase, and she, or rather her husband, for she married in the meanwhile, was paid that sum on the day the Bridge was opened.

Telford was not the first who had proposed to bridge the Menai. Forty-two years before he had prepared his plans a Mr. Golborne sketched a design, and Rennie had at a later period proposed a cast-iron bridge to span the water in

THE OLD LANDING-PLACE ON THE ANGLESEY SHORE.

one arch. Even Telford's first proposals differed wholly from the design he eventually adopted; and he, like Rennie, favoured more than any other type of bridge the single cast-iron arch. Difficulties in the way of construction, in some degree, but in greater measure the objections of the seafaring interest engaged in navigating the Straits, led to this type being abandoned and the suspension principle adopted. A legend, much in favour at Llangollen, tells how the engineer, at a loss for ideas, obtained the suggestion for his Menai Bridge from a small bridge on the suspension principle that then crossed the Dee at Berwyn. However that may be, suspension bridges of practical use, if of no very great size or scientific construction, were already known to the world. Telford produced his design in 1818, and it was submitted to the Commissioners and authorised by Parliament in the following year. The design, carried out exactly as proposed, was to provide a level roadway across the Straits at a height of 100 feet above high water, with a clear opening between the main suspension towers of 579 feet, thus providing an ample fairway for mariners, and silencing the objections of the shipping interest. The spot chosen was at a narrowing of the channel, where the rocky shores, rising on either side abruptly to a considerable height, afforded this clearance, and where an island called Ynys-y-Moch gave a ready site for one of the great towers. Between these main supports of the

chains and the shores, a series of arches—four on the Anglesey side and three on the Carnarvonshire approach—were to support the rest of the roadway, to be 52 feet wide, divided into two carriage ways of 12 feet each, with a central footpath between of 4 feet width. The total height of the two great towers, above high water mark, was to be 153 feet, and the entire length of the bridge 1000 feet.

The first stone of this great work was laid on the 10th of August, 1819, when the tower on Ynys-y-Moch, on the Anglesey side, was begun. In the course of four years the whole of the masonry work was completed, and the series of piers and arches, built of Anglesey limestone, ready to receive the iron chains, weighing close upon 2,200 tons. The first of these was hauled up to its place on the 26th of April, 1825, in the presence of thousands of spectators, come, many of them, in expectation of seeing a colossal failure. When the hauling was completed, and the first of the sixteen great chains that carry the central span safely bolted in position, the friends who rushed to congratulate the anxious engineer found him on his knees, in prayer.

The last chain was in position by the 9th of July, the driving home of the final bolt, followed by the playing of "God Save the King" by a brass band placed in the centre of the bridge, and a triumphal march across it of workmen, amid volleys of cheers from those assembled thousands who seem to have been constantly on the spot for

more than two months, and were still there on the following 30th of January, when "this stupendous, pre-eminent, and singularly unique structure," as an old writer calls it, was opened "at thirty-five minutes after one o'clock a.m., to allow the Royal London and Holyhead Mail coach, conveying the London mail-bags for Dublin, to pass; David Davies, coachman, Wm. Read, guard." The Mail was followed by the Bangor Pilot, and the London, Oxford and Holyhead "Oxonian"; the Holyhead Road Commissioners, the engineer, and several thousands of persons.

The total cost of the bridge and approaches was £120,000; a very moderate sum in comparison with many other bridge-building works, and something less than one-fifth the cost of its huge neighbour, the Britannia railway bridge, two miles distant, down the Straits. Four workmen were killed during its progress.

Tolls are still taken at the Bridge. Foot-passengers and cyclists are alike charged a penny each, and flys and cabs a shilling; the charges running up curiously to half-a-crown for a stage coach, and three shillings for a "post-chaise, coach, landau, berlin, or barouche, or other vehicle with four wheels and four horses." These charges are arranged so as not to press too heavily upon the inhabitants of either side, and one payment frees the bridge for the rest of the day, the payer of one toll being allowed to come and go as often as he pleases up to twelve o'clock, midnight.

As a business speculation, if it had been built solely to that end, the Menai Bridge would be pronounced a failure, for the interest on capital originally expended comes, at five per cent., to £6,000 per annum, and the annual income from tolls, returned in 1837 as £1,200, when the coaches were still running, must now be less rather than more. In addition to the original cost, the charge for upkeep must be taken into consideration, although, as the ironwork has not been painted for many years past, that, perhaps, does not bulk very largely.

Proposals made by the County Councils of Carnarvon and Anglesey to purchase the bridge from the Government and to open it toll free have failed, the price asked being beyond the resources of those bodies.

LII

Across this monument of early engineering skill, with roadway swaying and vibrating to the passage of every vehicle, and bird's-eye views up and down the glittering waterway, Anglesey is entered. On its shores to the right sprawls Menai village, with Beaumaris in the distance, and down beneath, on the left, lies the Isle of Benglas, with the oddly placed church of Llantysilio on it.

You cannot unmoved set foot in Mona, as this was called before ever it obtained its name of Isle of the Angles. It was the last retreat of the Druids before the advance of the Roman power, and from it they incited the Welsh tribes to resistance. It was in A.D. 61 that Suetonius Paulinus, the Roberts of that distant past, made his great march across Britain, with a resolution to finally crush their mystic power. His line of march followed the Watling Street, bringing him to the shores of the Menai Straits at *Segontium*, now identified with Carnarvon. Arrived there, his first care was to provide a flotilla of flat-bottomed boats where the Straits narrow, at a point now known as Port Dinorwic. When this was done, and all in readiness for crossing, he found the passage energetically disputed, and the unknown shores of the island lined with a terror-striking army of blue-stained Britons, white-robed Druids, and shrieking women clad in dark and dismal garments, with hair streaming wildly over their faces, and carrying torches. These ministering angels ran like furies up and down the rocks, and cursed; while the Druids prayed and cursed in one breath. These unusual sights and sounds so astonished the Roman soldiery that they gaped with dismay, and stood unnerved, an excellent mark for the javelins the enemy began to throw at them. They would probably have fled had it not been for their own general, who encouraged them by promising death to all who flinched. Death, therefore, being rather more of a certainty

in the rear, they made a wild rush, closed with the howling mob, and completely defeated them. Many Druids were roasted on their own sacrificial altars that day, as just burnt-offerings to atone for the cruelty of a blood-stained religion that demanded living victims and divined events from the inspection of human entrails. The sacred groves of Mona were cut down, the altars

DESERTED STABLES, MENAI VILLAGE.

demolished, and the island reduced to a conquered province.

Having said thus much, and given the views of the Druids and their practices popularly received, it is only fair to those ancients and to the respectable old gentlemen who, in these days of Celtic revivals and Eisteddfodau, become Arch Druids and things of that sort, and attend gatherings in mystic garments like nightshirts

over their highly respectable tweed trousers and broadcloth frock-coats—it is only just and fair to say that Julius Cæsar, in his *Commentaries*, gives the Druids a very high character. The priests, he says, taught the immortality of the soul, and held truth to be the highest virtue. They were sound as priests, as legislators politic, and as philosophers enlightened and humane.

THE MENAI BRIDGE AND THE ISLE OF BENGLAS.

We have nothing in the way of public men so good as this nowadays, and therefore we cannot but deplore the action of Suetonius Paulinus in wiping them off the face of the earth; and at the same time may hope that the Arch Druids and lesser Druids of modern summer gatherings in Wales, who look so supremely silly with laurel wreaths round their respectable old bald heads, and white whiskers and collars beneath—

and would certainly not dream of auguring over any fellow-creature's entrails—may get equal wisdom and political soundness.

There is on the Anglesey side, near Llanedwen, a field called "Maes Mawr Gad," or the Field of the Great Army, marking the spot where Paulinus and his victorious host landed. The Roman general rested but a short while here, for the Druids had scarce been blotted out when the terrible news reached him of the revolt of the Iceni, and the massacre at Camulodunum. He hasted back, collecting an army of ten thousand on the way, and, leaving the young and old and defenceless of Verulamium to their fate, advanced into Essex and utterly defeated Boadicea.

LIII

Very few are the old travellers or modern writers who have a good word to say for Anglesey. It is "flat, dull, monotonous, barren, treeless, wind-swept," and many more things expressed by adjectives in the uncomplimentary sort; but will the present historian be credited when, with his hand upon his heart, and if necessary—should his bare word not be held to deserve credit when opposed to that bulk of damnatory evidence—his lips upon the Book

he declares that Anglesey is none of these things? A recent traveller finds in the word "Mona" what he calls a "soft-sounding name, well suited to the present aspect" of the island. What does he mean? "In all the bare, flat fields," he continues, "you scarcely see a tree." To this the returned traveller from Anglesey may reply, in the inelegant but expressive schoolboy phrase, "What rot!" But then that writer traversed Anglesey by train, as he confesses, and therefore has no *locus standi* in topographical criticism. Probably the others explored the island as little as he.

It is a high table-land of an island, mounted atop of rugged cliffs for a goodly part of its jagged and irregular circumference, and divided athwart by the Malldraeth Marsh, a valley almost deep enough to admit the sea, which would in that case divide the isle in two unequal parts. Even the modern and easy high road, made by Telford in 1825 for a direct line from Menai Bridge to Holyhead, is by no means flat; while the old coach road is not only hilly but mountainous. Along its course lies Penmynydd, whose very name, meaning "mountain-head," should have checked the pen that talked of flatness in Anglesey. This was the place where the mails and the stages were commonly upset: the place that so alarmed London coachmen imported for the duty of driving the mails, that they refused to remain. Penmynydd is the worst spot on that old road, but hills along its course are the

almost invariable rule, and flat stretches the very infrequent exceptions.

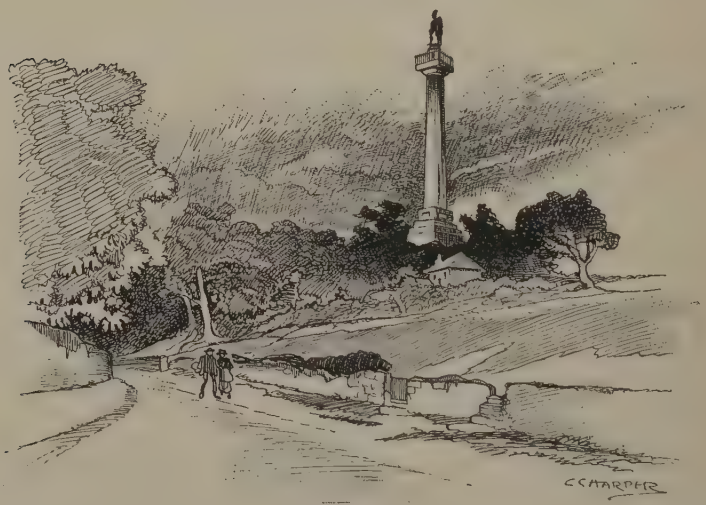
Now as to the barrenness of Anglesey. That is a contention no Anglesey farmer will support, for the island is a quite celebrated dairying district; and the best of butter and milk are not usually obtainable from barren wildernesses. From one or other of the numerous tor-like granite-crowned hillocks that plentifully stud the Anglesey landscape, and give it a close resemblance to Cornwall, fertile farms and numerous scattered white farmsteads and cottages are seen. They paint prosperity in the mind's eye, small though many of the holdings and cottages be, and although in a proportion of them lives a mining class. These whitewashed granite cottages and the stone walls that fence the fields render the resemblance to Cornwall very close: and no one yet has been found to apply such disparaging remarks as those quoted above to that county. As in Cornwall, too, the myrtle, the hydrangea, and the tree-fuchsia flourish all the year round in the cottagers' gardens, and few sights are so lovely as that of a lowly, granite one-storeyed cottage, its walls and garden-walls alike whitewashed, and its garden luxuriating with the myriad red and purple blooms of the fuchsia, the pale mauve or pink blossoms of the hydrangea, or the more delicate petals of the myrtle. Windswept the hills of Anglesey are in winter, but in the warm and sheltered valleys these alien creatures of the garden live unharmed.

Nor even is the isle treeless. So little so is it that the pine-woods of Menai village might reasonably for their beauty and extent be envied by Bournemouth itself; while peculiarly characteristic of Anglesey are the strange groups of trees, looking like lineal descendants of Druidical groves, that are everywhere to be seen; generally very fine umbrageous trees, and often hiding in their midst some old mansion or farmstead of the larger kind.

LIV

The first two miles into Anglesey command the whole range of the Snowdonian mountains; but nothing could be more monumentally striking than the Anglesey Column that shoots up from the wooded, rock-strewn hill of Craig-y-Dinas on the way to the village of "Llanfairpwllgwyngyll," as a board on the post office amiably shortens that terrific place-name. The column, itself 100 feet in height, designed in the Doric style, rises from a crest 260 feet above the waters of the Straits, and commemorates the first Marquis of Anglesey; he who, as "Lord Paget" and "Lord Uxbridge," warred with Wellington in the Peninsula and at Waterloo, where he left a leg, shot off towards the close of that famous victory. He was created Marquis of Anglesey three weeks after the battle,

and lived to enjoy his title until 1854. He saw the column rise, long years before, but the bronze statue of him was not erected until 1860. It represents him in hussar uniform, standing with contemplative gaze across the water, towards England. The curious old uniform and the green stains with which the storms and rains of over forty years have coloured the metal give the



THE ANGLESEY COLUMN.

bronze Marquis quite an awful Arabian Nights kind of blood-curdling uncanniness in certain conditions of light and shade. It is possible to make closer acquaintance with him by climbing the staircase within the column, and to see from that eyrie the family seat of Plas Newydd down below, by the water-side—the name of it latterly altered by the present Marquis, of jewel-

robbery fame, to "Anglesey Castle." It was there that George IV. stayed in 1821, and heard of the death of his Queen. Doubtless the bluff Marquis congratulated him on the event, for he was no adherent of Caroline, having, indeed, the worst opinion of that more or less injured lady. Time was, indeed, when his house in London had been assailed by a mob clamouring in her favour. They insisted upon his drinking the Queen's health, and he did. "The Queen," he said, with bitter sarcasm, "and may all your wives be like her!" What more could champions desire? Yet it is possible that they were not satisfied.

The full name of the village that now comes in view at a bend of the road presents an unparalleled array of grotesquely assorted letters to the bewildered Saxon. It is without doubt by far the longest place-name in the United Kingdom, and can probably challenge the whole world. It is Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerchwyrn-drobwlltysiliogogogoch. The stationers and book-sellers of Bangor and Menai Village sell for the modest price of one penny what is described as the "Englishman's cure for lock-jaw"—a printed sheet with this fearsome word divided into its proper syllables, and the translation into English underneath. Enterprising tourists, at pains to master the pronunciation of Welsh, go forth into Anglesey, and, having caught a Welshman who can be made to understand a little English, parade their version; but when the native can

be induced to pronounce it at all the name sounds very different. He generally, however, calls it "Llanfairpwllgwyngyll"; while the sign-posts, not provided with longer arms than usual, are models of compression, with "Llanfair P G"; the London and North-Western Railway recklessly naming the station "Llanfair," careless of the fact that Llanfair, meaning "St. Mary's Church," is as common a Welsh place-name as Jones is among Welshmen.

But this astonishing name, like most others in the Principality, is (or was originally) descriptive, and contained almost as much local information as a guide-book. Done into English it means "the church of Saint Mary in the hollow of white hazel, near to the rapid whirlpool of Saint Tysilio and a red cave." The church of St. Mary may, indeed, be found in the deep hollow at the foot of an incredibly steep lane and by the shores of the Menai, where whirlpools of sorts are created by the tides that set so strongly through the Straits, and rise and fall over twenty feet; but the red cave is not now to be discovered, and they are oaks and elms rather than white hazels that to-day enshroud the hollow.

Llanfair church has been rebuilt and is uninteresting. In its churchyard, close to the shore and almost in the shadow of the great Britannia Tubular Bridge that carries the mail trains between Anglesey and the mainland, one may find the decaying monument, overgrown

with bushes, erected to the memory of fifteen men who lost their lives on the bridge works between 1846 and 1850. The bridge itself, "that 'ere great, long, ugly iron thing," as the coachmen whom it drove off the last length of road called it, bulks large from this point of view, with an irrevocable air in its straight, clear-cut lines and massiveness, and a stern and solemn grandeur—like that of some Egyptian monument; in sharp contrast with the Menai

THE BRITANNIA BRIDGE.

Suspension Bridge, spanning the waters in the distance like the product of some fairy wand.

It was in April 1846 that the foundation stone of this great structure on the then Chester and Holyhead Railway was laid, on the Britannia Rock in the middle of the Straits. The rock itself obtained its name from the "Britannia," a vessel wrecked some years before at this point, and in its turn suggested the very appropriate title of the bridge. The width of the Straits, here about 1,100 feet, presented an even graver

problem to Robert Stephenson than had been faced by Telford, over twenty years before, for not merely a suspended road-bridge, but a rigid structure to sustain the burden of trains weighing 200 tons had to be designed. The Admiralty, jealous to preserve the navigation, forbade an arched bridge of any less height than a clear hundred feet above high water, and moreover refused to allow the interruption of the passage for a single day during the construction. Arches were out of the question, and eventually Stephenson resolved what was then the novelty of a bridge on the beam principle, consisting of rectangular iron tubes supported at intervals by giant masonry piers. There are three of these supports: the Britannia pier and tower, midway, and one on either shore. The two spans, or main tubes as they are called, across the water are each 472 feet in length, and that of the side spans 230 feet each; the whole length of the bridge 1841 feet, the weight of iron 10,000 tons, and the cost £602,000. The idea of this vast mass of riveted iron being elastic, seems grotesque, but when Stephenson designed the bridge he had sufficient forethought to allow for the expanding and contracting properties of iron under extremes of heat and cold. This precaution for securing free movement of the tubes, that would otherwise have broken down the supporting piers, took the form of allowing their ends to rest on cast-iron rollers and balls in a clear space left

in the masonry. Experience has shown the expansion and contraction to be fully twelve inches. The first train ran through on March 5th, 1850, completing the present railway route from London to Holyhead; and although the weight of locomotives and trains has doubled since then, the bridge still serves its purpose.

A near sight of the Bridge is generally sought for, and when one has climbed the railway embankment and walked along the line to its gloomy entrance, it can scarce be denied that the expedition is worth the while. There are the two parallel tubes for up and down lines, and above them the masonry of the Anglesey tower; on it deeply carved the name of Robert Stephenson and the date. On either side the colossal granite figure of an Egyptian lion crouches on its pedestal, guarding the approach, and with sphinx-like inscrutable gaze seeming to bide the coming of an appointed day. The impression of weird mysticism they give at twilight; the inky blackness of the two railway tubes in between; the evening mists gathering over the Snowdon heights in the background; and the last rays of the setting sun flushing the Britannia tower with a dusky red, is indescribable. Suddenly as one gazes, a hollow rumbling is heard, gradually increasing until with a hellish clang and the reverberation of a million echoes, a train dashes out, bringing with it a taste of the sooty air that lingers in the tubes, the product of fifty

years, and abominably like that of an unswept chimney.

But the curiosities of Llanfairpwllgwyngyll are not yet exhausted. One other remains, in the shape of a colossal granite statute of Lord Nelson, claimed to have been "designed" by Lord Clarence Paget, placed ridiculously on an undersized pedestal on the sea-weedy rocks by the Menai. It is, as a matter of fact, an exact copy of the well-known statue crowning the Nelson Column in Trafalgar Square, with empty sleeve pinned across the breast and cocked hat on head. Here, lonely in a meadow, beside the water he stands, with a very fine view of nothing in particular, and looking as though left to be called for. The curious who seek to know all about it may make the circuit of the slippery rocks and find the date 1873, and, facing the water, Nelson's famous signal, "England expects that every man will do his duty." But why the statue should find a place here, in so remote a spot, is not revealed.

LV

From the old toll-house at Llanfairpwllgwyngyll to Holyhead it is only twenty-one miles, but there are no fewer than five toll-houses on the way, all in as good and sufficient repair as

though they had only retired from business yesterday. And indeed it is not so long since the gates were swept out of existence, and this remote corner of the country freed from these irritating taxes on the farmers and villagers. It is a curious fact that to the Holyhead Road belongs the distinction of having been under the control of turnpike trusts for a longer period than any road in the kingdom. That

NEAR MONA INN.

portion of it lying in Bedfordshire and Bucks was the first road placed in the care of trustees, instead of in the hands of the parish surveyors, and is described in the Act of 1706, handing it over to the new jurisdiction, as "now and for many years past the common post-road towards Ireland." The greater number of the gates were swept away from 1860 to 1870, but Shropshire was not rid of them until November 1st, 1883, nor Denbighshire and Merioneth

until a year later; while, under the Annual Turnpike Continuance Act of 1884, the Carnarvonshire gates levied toll until November 1st, 1890, and by the Act of that year the Anglesey gates were continued until November 1st, 1895.

At Gaerwen village the road descends to Pentre Berw, the "Holland Arms," and the snipe-haunted Malldraeth Marsh; rising again to

LLANGRISTIOLUS.

where the church and isolated cottages of Llangristiolus stand overlooking a vast expanse of mountains, marsh, and sea, from a curious rocky bluff, cleft by a huge fissure; the effect, perhaps, of some prehistoric earthquake. The name of Llangristiolus, grotesque though it sounds, means the "church of the most worshipful Christ." "Mona," two miles beyond, the place mentioned on all the Anglesey milestones, is—or was when such things were—the "half-

way house between Bangor and Holyhead. The inn, for such it was, is referred to by Telford in his reports to the Holyhead Road Commissioners as having been a part of the work undertaken, and the cost of building it is included in the estimates. Never anything but ugly, it is a melancholy enough place in these days of railway travel: remote in the middle of Anglesey, and now a farmhouse, encircled with trees.

Gwalchmai, by comparison with Mona, is a veritable metropolis, with inns, aye, and shops, and a post-office. Between this and Bryngwran, a stone-walled enclosure in midst of hillside fields marks the spot where some one has chosen to be buried. Why that solitary place was selected is hid from the Saxon by the Welsh inscription on the tombstone.

Now comes the village of Caer Ceiliog, with windmills and toll-house overlooking the descent from Anglesey into Holy Island. When the gate was first erected the Road Commissioners experienced some little trouble at the hands of a certain Reverend Mr. Griffiths, who had objections against paying tolls. It seems that when the parish had made all the necessary legal arrangements with the Commissioners for the new road constructed just here, the authority required for stopping up the old one was forgotten and not applied for; so when the old way was abandoned and fenced in, compelling travellers to pass through the gate and pay toll,

the Reverend Mr. Griffiths, learned in the law, pulled down the obstructions and passed down the old road, toll free. Naturally, the neighbours all followed his example, and the horrified lessee of the tolls, who had bought them at auction for the year, saw his income going. The trouble had to be remedied by a special Act.

CAER CEILIOG.

From Caer Ceiliog the crest of Holyhead Mountain, ten miles distant, is seen; a dark-blue mass suspended, to all appearance, in mid-air, like some fabled scene of *Arabian Nights* adventures. It is the original Holy Head; in Welsh "Pen Caer Cybi," or the Head of Cybi's town—Cybi himself a Welsh saint who somewhere about the year 500 founded a college where Holyhead town now stands. That rugged

mountain rises from the sea to a height of 719 feet, and is rarely free from the dense sea-fogs that make the neighbourhood of Holyhead so dangerous to mariners. The billowy vapours, often leaving the upper part of the mountain clear, create this startlingly complete illusion of a suspended island, and dispose the stranger to come into Holyhead expectant of marvels.

Coming, thus expectant, down from Caer Ceiliog, the old road is crossed at Valley, a modern village with a railway station. A quarter of a mile beyond, road and rail go side by side across the Stanley Sands, dividing Anglesey and Holy Island : the road on Telford's great mile-long embankment and the rail on the left, hid from sight by a dull masonry wall some sixteen or twenty feet high. The scene is still as melancholy as it was when Borrow tramped past, with the broad channel a waste of sand at low tide, and a furious salt-water stream at the flood, rushing with great force through the arches in the middle of the embankment. The winds that boom and buzz across the flat shores and rank grasses, and the waves lapping about the seaweed and rotting timbers of ancient wrecks, give the place a sinister and mournful air.

At the Holy Island end of the embankment stands the last toll-house, and thenceforward the town of Holyhead begins.

LVI

This destination of the Holyhead Road, its sponsor and reason for existence, makes a very sorry ending to these two hundred and sixty miles of picturesque and historic scenery. It is a squalid little town, set down, to all appearance, at the edge of the known world, and only existing on the traffic of its harbour. Described by Swift so long ago as 1727 as "a scurvy, unprovided, comfortless place," and in Ogilby's *Roads*, of 1749, as "consisting chiefly of houses for the entertainment of such persons as are bound for Ireland, or just arrived thence," it has not advanced far in all the years that have passed since those unflattering descriptions were penned.

Swift, to be sure, came to Holyhead in a fury. When, however, was he not possessed of that "*saeva indignatio*" referred to even in his epitaph? He had come by Penmynydd, where he had hoped to see Owain Tudor's tomb, but missed the place by the knavery of the guide, who wanted to be moving on. Wearied with riding, he then rested two hours at Llangefni. "Then I went on, very weary, but in a few miles more Wat's horse lost his two fore-shoes, so the horse had to limp after us. The Guide was less concerned than I. In a few miles more my horse lost a fore-shoe, and could not go on the rocky ways. I walked about two miles to spare him. It was Sunday, and no smith to be got. At last there was a smith in

the way; we left the Guide to shoe the horses, and walked to a Hedge Inn three miles from Holyhead. There I stayed an hour with no ale to be drunk. A boat offered, and I went by sea, and sailed in it to Holyhead. The Guide came about the same time. I dined with an old innkeeper, Mrs. Welsh, about three, on a loyn of mutton, very good, but the worst ale in the world, and no wines, for the day before I came here a vast number went to Ireland, after having drunk out all the wine. There was stale beer, and I tryed a receit of Oyster shells, which I got powdered on purpose, but it was good for nothing. I walked on the rocks in the evening, and then went to bed, and dreamt that I had got twenty falls from my horse."

Swift lay here for seven days waiting for the packet to sail. On the 28th of September it set forth, but was obliged by stress of weather to return, and it does not appear how much longer he was detained. In these empty days of waiting he wrote the verses:—

Lo, here I sit at holy head,
With muddy ale and mouldy bread;
I'm fastened both by wind and tide,
I see the ships at anchor ride.
All Christian vittals stink of fish,
I'm where my enemyes would wish.
Convict 'of lies is ev'ry sign,
The Inn has not one drop of wine,
The Captain swears the sea's too rough—
(He has not passengers enough.)
And thus the Dean is forc'd to stay,
Till others come to help the pay.

The room smoked, but it was too cold to be without a fire. "There is," he writes, "or should be, a Proverb here:

> When Mrs. Welsh's chimney smokes,
> 'Tis a sign she'll keep her folks;
> But when of smoke the room is clear,
> It is a sign we shan't stay here.

Thus his notes run on: "Dined like a king all alone for seven days. Whoever would wish to live long should live here, for a day is longer than a week, and, if the weather be foul, as long as a fortnight. Pray pity poor Wat, for he is called Dunce, Puppy, and Liar five hundred times an hour; and yet he means not ill, for he means nothing." Wat he ordered to wipe his wet gown and cassock, and he did so with a meal-bag, with the result that it was caked thickly with a kind of meal-plaster. When at last the Dean did leave Holyhead, he carried with him memories not likely to be speedily effaced.

Wesley had something like these experiences in 1748, when he was storm-bound for eleven days. He spent the time mainly in preaching, but for all practical purposes might just as well have stayed within doors, for he laments that his congregations did not understand English. It is difficult to decide whose was the greater foolishness—that of the preacher who preached in a strange tongue, or that of those who listened to words they could not comprehend. Two years

later he was at Holyhead, detained for three days, and then, obliged by storms to return for another eight, he "expounded the story of Dives and Lazarus to a room full of men daubed with gold and silver." *They*, at any rate, seemed to understand, for they "took it in ill part, and went away railing and blaspheming." These "sons of Belial," as he calls them, returned, and would have seriously injured him, but that he was locked in the room. They were at last dispersed by a courageous maidservant, who threw a bucket of water over them.

No longer is it necessary for travellers to wait shivering for days before winds and weather permit of the Channel being crossed. They arrive nowadays for the most part at dark and ungodly hours, at railway terminus or harbour, and are at once whisked away to Dublin or to London. Some may make acquaintance with the Railway Hotel, but, beyond that, Holyhead merely stands for a name and an hour in the time-tables. It was different before the steam packets began from July 1st, 1819, to make the sixty-four miles passage in $7\frac{1}{2}$ hours. To wait a week at Holyhead before the crossing could be made was no unusual experience in the old sailing days, when a good average passage took fifteen hours, and a very bad one more than double the time. Even the journey by steamer has been cut down to half its duration, and now takes only from $3\frac{1}{2}$ to 4 hours, so that the passengers who halt at Holyhead are few and far

between, and the town lives only in an indirect way on the traffic between the kingdoms. It remains no more than a fringe of hilly, gaunt, and aimless streets gathered round the harbour and railway station, with the old church of St. Cybi in their midst, its central tower surmounted by what has been described as "a low, flat spire." The traveller will doubtless be as eager to see this curiosity of a flat spire as he would to discover a round square, a square angle, or anything else equally unknown to Euclid.

LVII

THERE still stands, at the entrance to the Pier, the granite archway erected to commemorate the landing of George IV. in 1821. Severely classical, in the Doric sort, it resembles (save that it is not so large and not so black) the funereal entrance to the Euston terminus of the London and North-Western Railway. It bears an inscription in Welsh—"Cof-Adail i Ymweliad y Brenin Gior y IV. ag ynys fôn. Awst VII., MDCCCXXI."—which those whose Pentecostal attainments render it possible may translate.

Holyhead was a proud town that day, August 7th, when George IV. landed, on his trip to Ireland. He had come, aboard the yacht *Royal George*, round by St. George's Channel,

escorted by a squadron, and spent five days in the Isle of Anglesey, detained by contrary winds. "His Majesty," says a contemporary report, "was struck with admiration at the appearance of the town"; and we in our turn might well be struck with astonishment, were it not that modern monarchs are the best of actors and can smile approval to order.

But, in spite of this admiration, the King did not stop at Holyhead. That battered warrior, the Marquis of Anglesey, took him across the island to Plâs Newydd. The next day died Queen Caroline, at Hammersmith, and the news by incredible efforts reached the squadron lying off Holyhead the day after. The King was freed at last from the wife he hated, and his feeling towards her was sufficiently marked by the facts that the squadron did not fire the salute of minute-guns usual on such occasions, and that the trip to Ireland, with its attendant banquets and rejoicings, was not interrupted.

The winds that could in those days detain a fleet, and kept the King's yacht and his escort swinging for days idly at their anchorage, made a vast difference to Holyhead. The *Times* correspondent on that occasion tells how scarce provisions grew, and to what extravagant prices ordinary articles of food rose. Eggs, he wails, were sixpence each, and for neither love nor money could he obtain any Welsh mutton for his dinner. He was, accordingly, truly thankful when the squadron sailed and plenty reigned

once more. The King left, however, before his escort. He had observed how the Dublin new steam-packets crossed, irrespective of weather, and took passage on the 12th, aboard the *Lightning*, named afterwards, in honour of the occasion, the *Royal George the Fourth*.

When, in 1854, Borrow walked into Holyhead, he stayed at the "Railway Hotel," a "noble and first-rate" house. All others were described to him as "poor places, where no gent puts up." What, then, had become of the several mentioned in the works of Cary and Paterson; the hostelries that had been sufficient for the needs of coaching times? Only four years had then passed since the last coach was driven off these ultimate miles, and yet Maran's Hotel, the "Royal," the "Hibernian," the "Eagle and Child," and others, were already dismissed among those unmentionable "poor places." Possibly travellers by coach put up with a great deal more than railway passengers would tolerate. An illuminating side-light on these matters is shed by Jack Williams' recommendation of the Holyhead inns, quoted by Colonel Birch-Reynardson; and certainly Jack Williams, who drove the Mail between Bangor and Holyhead, should have been an authority.

"Coachman, do you know Holyhead well?" asked a passenger. "Me know Holyhead," said Jack, who spoke with a strong Welsh accent. "Yes, inteed; I suppose I to; at laste I should to; I've lived there all my life. Yes,

inteed; I was pred and porn there." "Then you can tell me, I dare say, which is the best inn; for I want to stay a day or two at Holyhead." "How should I know the best inn?" said Jack. "Well, if you know Holyhead so well, surely you must know which is the best inn." "Well, inteed, I know that there's two inns in Holyhead, but I canna say which is the pest; I never goes to either of 'em." "Well, but you must know which of them is called the best, and which would be best for a gentleman to stay at." "Well, inteed," said Jack, at last, "I'll tell you how it is. Should you wish to get drunk, go to Spencer's. Should you wish to get lousey, go to Moland's."

"Maran's" was probably the house meant. As Colonel Birch-Reynardson remarks, it is not likely that the landlord or the landlady would have felt flattered by Jack Williams' account of what any one going to their house was to expect.

No one need look to match Borrow's experience at the "Railway Hotel," where "Boots" was a poet and critic of poets. "In those days," says Borrow, "there never was such a place for poets as Anglesey; one met a poet, or came upon the birthplace of a poet, everywhere." Every one is now a great deal more matter-of-fact, and railway and steam packet time-tables are the forms of literature best known to the modern hotel staff.

Holyhead, in short, is but a dependency of the London and North-Western Railway, and

wakes up only at those intervals when the steamers and the trains arrive. Then, just as though it were an ingenious mechanical toy of a larger growth, like those that used to be—perhaps are now—at the Crystal Palace, and as though the necessary penny had dropped into the mechanism, everything begins to work furiously. Trains roll in, electric lights glare coldly from tall standards in the docks, mountains of luggage are shot out upon platforms or quay walls; porters, sailors, passengers, newsboys, and a miscellaneous crowd rush back and forth, just after the fashion of those little clockwork mannikins in the glass cases. Then the whistles of the steamer or train blow; the passengers are all aboard, the porters trundle their trucks back whence they came, the crowd disperses, the newsboys end in the midst of their shouting, and out go the lights; all as though the machine had done its allotted task, but would begin it all over again if another coin were forthcoming.

Some day, when the oft-discussed project is realised of making Holyhead, instead of Liverpool, the terminus of the trans-Atlantic voyage, the melancholy wastes surrounding the town will be built upon or excavated for docks. Even now, a large proportion of the American passenger traffic comes this way: travellers landing from the great liners at Queenstown saving time and escaping the tedious up-channel voyage and delays at Liverpool by taking train

from Queenstown for Dublin, and so across to Holyhead.

More than five millions sterling have been sunk in harbour, lighthouse, and railway works at this bleak port. Close under the sheltering hills behind the town are the original harbour and the railway company's improvements upon it; and away in the distance the great breakwater of the Harbour of Refuge, that occupied twenty-eight years in building, and was completed in 1873. The breakwater stretches half way across Holyhead Bay, a distance of nearly a mile and a half, with a lighthouse at its seaward end; the greater lighthouses of the Skerries, seven miles away, and the South Stack, on the other side of Holyhead Mountain, guarding the approaches to this perilous coast.

LVIII

But to end the Holyhead Road in the mean streets of Holyhead, or by merely tracing Telford's modern highway, would be to conclude on a very feeble and inadequate note. Fortunately, the "old post road" across Anglesey still remains. It is three miles longer than Telford's, and is especially interesting because it affords an excellent means of seeing with our own eyes what were the difficulties

travellers had to contend with in the days before road reform. The twists and turns, and hills and hollows, remain just as they were, but as the road is still in use as a means of communication between several villages, with one town midway, the surface, it is safe to assume, is in better condition than in old times. It branches off to the right from the modern road, half a mile beyond Menai Bridge, and gives a taste of its quality at the outset, in making straight for a steep hill. Having climbed this, and passed through Braint and Ceint, up and down and to right and left, it climbs the hill of Penmynydd, whose very name is significant. Here the stage-coaches and the mails were accustomed to be overturned, and it was at sight of this portion of the road that some London coachmen, imported to work this stage, threw up their engagement and went home again. Travellers were not so much interested in Penmynydd being the historic place whence sprang the Tydyrs ("Tiddir" in the Welsh pronunciation and "Tudor" in English), as they were concerned in getting over the ground without broken bones; and the horsemen who preceded coach-travelling looked dismayed in each other's faces at such a wild spot as this; reassured, however, on descending the rough and stony hill by a sight of a gallows that then overhung the roadway. Cheered by this evidence of law and order extending to the uttermost verge of the land, they removed their hands

from their pistol holsters and spurred onward with renewed assurance.

Llangefni, beyond Penmynydd, has grown into a town since those times, with a big "Bull" hotel. At Gwyndû or Glanyrafon, half-way across the Island, an old coachman, not so handy as most of his fellows, failed to steer so neatly as he should between the great stones that in the good old days lay loosely about the road; with the result that the jolt knocked him off his box and he suffered a broken leg. Gwyndû in those times was a noted inn. It is now, like many another, a farmhouse, and all the historian can glean of its history is found in the fugitive notes of century-old tourists. Thus, a Mr. Hucks, pedestrianising in 1795, says he dined at Gwyndû inn, and that the hostess, a "fine old lady," paid him and his companion "the utmost attention, and appeared particularly solicitous; gave us her blessing at our departure, with a thousand admonitions not to lose ourselves," which of course they did. Rain and storm beset them, and they gladly quitted the "inauspicious island."

There is little difficulty in losing one's way on this old road, for when maps fail there is not a soul here who can understand the English tongue. One might talk Hindustani with equal chance of being understood. Welsh is the only language spoken, for the bi-lingual Welshman is left behind when crossing the Menai. Anglesey is the great

stronghold of the Welsh language, and in many of its villages it is impossible to find a single person who understands a word of English. *Dim saesoneg* is the sole reply the traveller is likely to meet with on the road, or if by chance, in some more civilised townlet, he makes himself understood, the broken and grotesque English of the replies he obtains is likely to be quite unintelligible. Even those who can command a little "Saxon" are chary of using it, and not a few of those who gruffly grunt *Dim saesoneg* do so because they are shy of their attempts at an unfamiliar tongue being laughed at.

The scenery on the high ground near Gwyndû may be commended to the attention of those who describe Anglesey as flat, dull, and featureless. Here the road, to the backward glance, looks down towards Bodffordd, in a deep hollow, and away across the island into a charmingly wooded valley, with great bosses of granite cropping out here and there, and in the distance the inevitable background to Anglesey scenery, the Snowdonian mountains. The hamlet of Llynfaes, with white-washed granite cottages, very quaint and homely, and very like Cornwall, is pleasing, and at Trefor there is a stretch of tree-shaded road whose like is not often found. Bodedern only is somewhat commonplace, and even that is transfigured by glimpses of the dark Holyhead Mountain and shining sea unfolded as the road goes downhill to Llanyngenedl, and thence to Valley. When it has crossed Telford's road at this last place, the

old way enters upon quite another kind of scenery; very beautiful in its sort. Hills, it is true, are not wholly left behind, but the prevailing landscape is flat, with wide, wild stretches of gorsy and heathery moor, threaded with salt-water creeks and pools. Holy Island is entered at Four-Mile Bridge, a causeway spanning the tidal channel. Windmills, seen in long perspective across the flats, shrilly piping gulls, salt pools, lichened granite rocks, and the ruins of Druidical cromlechs, make up the sum total of foreground and middle distance; with the sea at Penrhos and Trearddur Bay on the left, and a long line of roofs and chimneys in the background under Holyhead Mountain, standing for Holyhead town.

LIX

If a grand and awe-inspiring finish to the Holyhead Road be sought, let the pilgrim, instead of making for the town, ascend the misty steeps of Holyhead Mountain, and make his rugged and circuitous way to the South Stack. The road runs past some peculiarly depressing outskirts, and by a long row of empty and forlorn cottages offered to be let at fourpence a week, and not finding tenants even at that modest sum. These desolate dwellings were built for the use of the

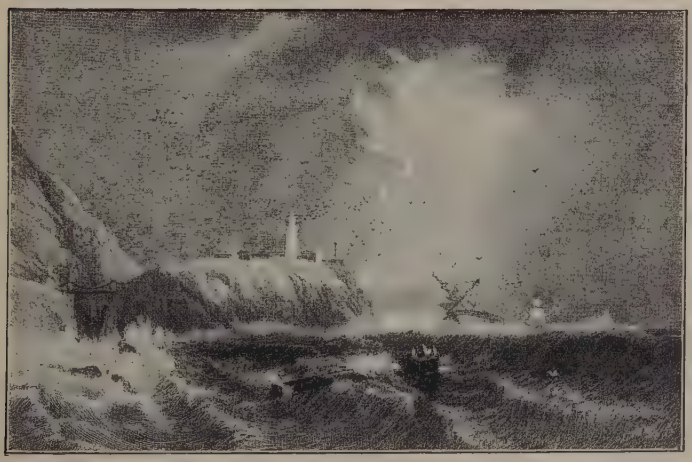
men employed on the Holyhead Harbour Works, and have not been occupied since the Harbour was completed.

The South Stack, at the rocky edge of Holy Island, cannot be gained under four miles of wandering by winding roads across the heathery uplands: the way traced by whitewashed stones placed at intervals to mark the track in foggy weather. Long before the traveller gains the cliff's edge, he will perhaps be suddenly overtaken by one of the sea fogs, and at last come to the place unawares. Then he may be grateful indeed for the strong breast-wall of masonry that saves the strayed visitor from walking over the precipices into the sea some five hundred feet below.

A sea-fog is a ghastly and chilling phenomenon, but in no other circumstances does the South Stack rock appear so impressive, or the fog-horn of its lighthouse seem so uncanny. As a light wind springs up and gradually clears away the fog, like clouds of white smoke, the first object looming in ghostly fashion out of the absolute void is the lighthouse lantern, apparently detached and swimming in air; while the strange bellowing, like that of a dyspeptic cow, that has been coming at half-minute intervals from some unknown quarter, is located from it. The distant wail, throbbing in a higher key across the invisible water, is the fog-horn on the Skerries.

As the fog gradually dies away, the light-

house becomes revealed with the island rock it stands upon. This is the South Stack: a great mass of seamed and crannied rock torn off from the cliffs and standing as an island, itself rising to a height of 212 feet above high water, and looked down upon by sheer granite cliffs three hundred feet taller. In the narrow chasm below the sea dashes savagely in and out of the gloomy



THE SOUTH STACK. *After T. Creswick, R.A.*

caverns, with a sound like muffled thunder. The grandeur and scale of this terrific scene—a fitting climax to all the varied scenery of the Holyhead Road—are not fully realised when looking down upon it. There, on the island rock, stands the white lighthouse, with whitewashed stone walls zigzagging along the verge of its cliffs, and forming a little compound where the store-houses and the cottages of the staff are

situated; and the whole looks so neat and toy-like that its dimensions are not at first grasped. But when the slow and winding descent to it down the face of the cliff by 381 rude rocky steps has been cautiously accomplished, the awful savagery of the spot is realised. There may possibly be a few places on these coasts to approach the grimly bristling rocks of the South Stack in their wild beauty, but none can surpass them.

At the foot of the long descent, but still perched high above the fearful waves that even in calm weather run and recede, hissing and foaming, for a distance of thirty or forty feet up and down the face of the cliffs, is the entrance to a suspension-bridge hung from side to side of the channel. Before this was built, the only means of access was by a line and basket, followed at a little later period by a rope bridge; but the risk was so great that the present one, a miniature reproduction of the Menai Bridge was constructed.

Perhaps as remarkable a feature of this strange place as anything else to be seen is the vast concourse of sea-birds inhabiting the rocks—shags, penguins, guillemots, cormorants, sea-gulls, puffins, razor-bills, and even peregrine falcons, screaming and chattering loud enough to drown even the sound of the waves. The lighthouse-keepers and other observers tell how the gulls all migrate to other and warmer climes on or about every 12th of August, return-

ing in a body about February 10th. The keepers state that in midst of the February night they are advised of the birds' arrival by a great noise, as though it were a mutual greeting and cheering. These feathered inhabitants of the South Stack are under the protection of the Government, and are as useful to the Trinity House as any of the lighthouses, buoys, beacons, or fog-horns on the coast; their incredible numbers and deafening noise warning mariners

HOLYHEAD MOUNTAIN.

just as effectually as any mechanical devices. As no sportsmen (so-called) are allowed to disturb the birds, they are wonderfully tame, and present an odd sight, row upon row of them perched upon the ledges like some vast and patient audience. The cliffs for long distances are populous with them, and one particularly noisy and turbulent place near the North Stack has acquired the name of the "Parliament House."

Here, then, where the sea-birds scream and

fly, on the rocky ramparts of this wild land, overlooking that broad belt of water known by choice either as St. George's Channel or the Irish Sea, shall the Holyhead Road most fittingly end. From this outlook one may watch the great liners coming by, bound for America, or within an hour of ending their voyage at Liverpool, and may see the packets set forth or come in from Ireland. Whether Ireland itself, or that other Mona, known better by its modern name of the Isle of Man, can be seen, lying afar off, like cloudbanks upon the horizon, is a matter for the most favourable weather, the keenest eyesight, and the most robust faith to decide in the affirmative, or for scepticism to deny.

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